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AN INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY
OF THE
SCOTTISH NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART:
TENSIONS, PARADOXES AND COMPROMISES

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me and is my own original work.

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The thesis draws heavily upon documents and statements from NGS staff found in the institution's archives: this material is reproduced here under copyright to the Trustees of the National Galleries of Scotland.

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ABSTRACT

This study provides the first comprehensive account of the institutional history of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (SNGMA) from the earliest calls for its foundation at the start of the twentieth century to the recent series of exhibitions marking its fiftieth anniversary in 2010. The SNGMA is both a unique case-study and a useful illustrative example of the specific category of modern art museum: the account of its history sets the institution within its wider cultural context and explores the inevitable complexities facing a public gallery devoted to modern art. The study examines how the institution has balanced the need to represent a full historical survey of modern art with the desire to engage with the contemporary, and how it has addressed the question of collecting and displaying the work of Scottish artists alongside international art. By providing a close documentary analysis of the evolution of the institution, drawn from within the Gallery's own archives, combined with extended reflections on the central dilemmas it has had to face, the study constitutes an original contribution to museum scholarship.

Various methodologies are employed to assess the diverse factors that have affected the institution's development. The narrative confirms the close correlation between the architectural frame and the public perception of the institution. It traces the evolution of the acquisitions policy and notes how this shaped the permanent collection, allowing a shift from an aspiration to universal coverage of the international trends of 20th century art to a more targeted specialisation in certain areas, primarily Dada and Surrealism. It charts the attitudes towards temporary exhibitions and the display of the permanent collection, and examines these in the light of current exhibition theory and practice. The analysis concludes that the SNGMA has been largely successful at achieving the aims and ambitions it originally defined for itself, although its role is constantly evolving in response to changes in the broader context of art museums.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GMA – Gallery of Modern Art

HLF – Heritage Lottery Fund

MoMA – Museum of Modern Art, New York

NACF – National Art Collections Fund

NG – National Gallery

NGS – National Galleries of Scotland

NMAS – National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland

RSA – Royal Scottish Academy

SMAA – Scottish Modern Arts Association

SNGMA – Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art

SNPG – Scottish National Portrait Gallery

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INTRODUCTION

‘a model of what can be achieved’

*The SNGMA stands out as a model of what can be achieved on a restricted budget by outstanding museum directors supported by enlightened donors.*¹

This tribute to the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (SNGMA) comes from Richard Dorment, art critic for the *Telegraph*, writing on the occasion of the inauguration of the fiftieth anniversary exhibition. It is a warm tribute that neatly summarises the strengths and weaknesses of the institution. The anniversary marks a significant milestone in the gallery’s history, and provides an opportunity to reflect on the aims and ambitions of the past and the achievements of the present. As well as this timely reflection, however, the institution merits thorough analysis for what it can reveal about the general principles that underpin any such organisation, as Dorment’s remark suggests. The SNGMA is both a unique case-study with its own particular combination of circumstances and a useful illustrative example of the specific category of modern art museum. A study of its successes and failures is opportune at a time when all museums are subject to intense scrutiny, ranging from the academic criticism generated by the ‘new museology’ of the 1980s and beyond, to the political, social and economic inspection carried out into all major publicly-funded cultural organisations.² The history of the SNGMA is worthy of note in itself, touching as it does on various questions relating to Scottish cultural identity and the response to visual culture over the twentieth century, but it is also representative of many elements of the history of the specific museum-type of galleries dedicated exclusively to modern art. The insights into these diverse issues will provide the current study with the starting point for a deeper analysis of the complexity of such an institution.

¹ Richard Dorment, *Daily Telegraph*, 28 August 2010.

² Randolph Starn’s ‘A Historian’s Brief Guide to New Museum Studies’, in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 110, no. 1, February 2005, cites an editorial in the 1985 International Council of Museums journal discussing ‘a New Museology in France’ as the first to raise the issue. Peter Vergo’s book, entitled *The New Museology*, appeared in 1988, a collection of essays that proposed a new, more critical discourse about the institution of the museum.

Given the intense current interest in Scotland's recent cultural heritage, an account of the evolution of one of the central institutions entrusted with providing Scotland with access to modern art is indeed timely.³

The opening quotation focuses attention on three key elements: the budget, the directors and the donors. The interplay between these factors is paramount throughout, but the contribution of the 'outstanding directors' is arguably what has been most influential at guiding the institution towards the form it now has. The way these individuals have dealt with the restricted budget and fostered relations with enlightened donors has enabled the gallery to grow steadily over the course of its first half-century. Because of its small scale, the contribution of certain key individuals has been of vital importance, and the structure of this study will inevitably reflect that perspective. The fact that there have only been three Directors over this fifty-year period explains the major contribution each has made, since each had time to impress his own vision on the institution.

The history of the institution forms a clear chronological narrative, starting with a pre-history dating back to the early years of the twentieth century, followed by a long wait until the official opening in 1960, and then an unfolding story of growth from a very small gallery possessing remarkably few works to its present status as a respected European modern art museum. The growth reference suggests that the institution can be viewed as an organic body, and therefore its history may be told through the lens of biography. Hermione Lee offers two metaphors to describe the biographical approach to history – the portrait, as a principally descriptive method, or the autopsy, as more concerned with analysing the most relevant events.⁴ This study will take elements from both, depicting the institution at the central moments of its evolution, but also examining in forensic detail the relevance of these central moments to assess how well it has performed the multiple roles that are expected of it. The purpose of the study is to ascertain what were the original intentions for the Gallery, to assess how well it has achieved the founding ambitions, to chronicle how those ambitions shifted over time, and to determine where it now stands in relation to other similar institutions and in relation to the general cultural context of Scotland in

³ Craig Richardson's recently published *Scottish Art since 1960* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011) is an example of the current interest in the subject: it devotes much attention to the SNGMA.

⁴ Hermione Lee, *Biography: a Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 1.

the twenty-first century. Lois Marie Fink articulates the importance of this type of investigation:

Without an understanding of their institution's history – as found in the archival records – administrators and their staff cannot confidently define the museum to their current patrons and boards, to the public – or even to themselves. Awareness of the founding mission, of early policies, and of institutional strengths and weaknesses form a background for sound decisions and actions in the present.⁵

The results of the investigation carried out for the current study will provide a foundation for that awareness. A division of the narrative into distinct time periods is intended to facilitate an understanding of the most relevant events as they have unfolded: that the time periods correspond roughly to the periods in office of the Directors is due precisely to the pivotal contribution that these individuals made.

Arthur Danto states that 'the story of anyone's life is never the simple unfolding through time of an internally programmed narrative... What makes biography worth writing and reading are the accidents, the intersection of crossed causal histories...'⁶ The story of the SNGMA comprises many such accidents and intersections, and the account of its biography will thus act as an analytical window into the wide range of issues that affect museums today, and in particular museums of modern art. It will explore the tensions inherent in an institution aspiring both to permanence and to novelty, and aiming to represent both Scottish and international art. It will uncover the compromises that have been imposed, particularly regarding the architectural envelope that contains and frames the institution and acts as an external sign for it. It will investigate the choices that have been made regarding which works of art to acquire for the permanent collection, the reasons behind the selection of certain works rather than others, and how the wide range of works selected have been displayed within the gallery. It will consider the programme of temporary exhibitions and how successful this has been at engaging the attention of the local public and beyond.

This history has been compiled from material from many sources. Firstly it draws on the documentary archives housed both in the Gallery itself and in the National Records of Scotland at Register House. Register House contains material relating to the proposals for a Gallery of Modern Art prior to its inception in 1960, while the

⁵ Lois Marie Fink, 'Museum Archives as Resources for Scholarly Research and Institutional Identity', in J. Marstine (ed.), *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*, (Malden, Mass; Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 296.

⁶ Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art, contemporary art and the pale of history* (Princeton; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1997) p. 41.

archives within the Gallery consist of exhibition files from the opening in 1960, acquisition files for all works in the collection, outgoing letters sent from the Gallery, and Keepers' Papers, including reports and memos on important events in the life of the Gallery. These have been enormously useful sources. Fink describes the excitement of the process:

You never know what you will find in sifting through personal letters and diaries, spying on meetings, learning about plans that never saw the light of day, finding personal opinions that contradict public statements. Such documents turn the past into the present, where ideas and actions can be observed as they develop with all of the doubts and hopes that accompany an unknown conclusion.⁷

As an AHRC-funded Collaborative Doctoral Award project, the study benefits from unrestricted access to precisely this type of documentation, which would otherwise be difficult to unearth. Several of the early reports and memos convey something of the process of internal discussion and negotiation that went on within the organisation, and inform us about those 'plans that never saw the light of day'. These internal documentary sources offer insights into many decisions that otherwise remain difficult to explain, and are open to misinterpretation. Other significant documentary sources from the Gallery are the various publications they have produced, such as explanatory leaflets or exhibition catalogues. The Board Room Minutes also provide evidence of the issues that have confronted the institution over the course of its history. Local and national newspapers reveal how matters relating to the Gallery were reported, and letters published in newspapers show some of the attitudes of the public to events relating to the Gallery of Modern Art. In addition to these printed archival sources, the current study has also benefited from interviews with many of the protagonists in the story, in particular the three Keepers (or Directors, as the position was later entitled) of the Gallery, Douglas Hall, Richard Calvocoressi and the current incumbent, Simon Groom, as well as members of the team of curators at present working in the Gallery.⁸ They have all been willing to share their thoughts

⁷ Fink, p. 293.

⁸ The titles used to describe the person charged with running the SNGMA have changed over time, partly to reflect changing expectations of the role, but also changes in the relationship between the SNGMA and its sister galleries within the NGS, the National Gallery of Scotland and the Portrait Gallery. Hall was appointed as the new Gallery's first Assistant Keeper (see p. 57), under David Baxandall as Director of the NGS. He was later promoted to the role of Keeper, and was followed in this position by Calvocoressi. During Timothy Clifford's period in office as Director of the NGS, Clifford altered the management structure of the organisation, renaming his own position as Director General, and replacing the term Keeper with Director for the person in charge of administering the SNGMA and the SNPG. The most recent appointment to the chief position at the SNGMA has seen another change, with the post being re-defined as Director of Modern and Contemporary Art at the NGS. This shift in focus will be examined in detail on p. 222.

about their aspirations for the institution, and about the decisions they made that affected its development.

With such a wealth of documentary material from these sources, it would have been possible to construct a predominantly descriptive account of the history of the institution. This would have been a useful addition to the field of institutional histories, as there is currently no historical account recording the development of the Gallery. It would have followed such examples as Frances Spalding's history of the Tate, Jonathan Conlin's extensive history of the National Gallery in London, or Charles Saumarez Smith's shorter version of the history of the National Gallery.⁹

Alternatively, the material could have been organised thematically, extracting certain key questions arising from the historical account, and subjecting them to a critical analysis using the criteria suggested by the rapidly developing discipline of museum studies. Here the field is constantly expanding, but most subsequent publications have drawn inspiration from such seminal texts as Peter Vergo's *The New Museology*, Carol Duncan's *Civilizing Rituals*, Tony Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum* and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*.¹⁰ These form the foundation of the critical approach to museum studies that flourished during the 1980s and 1990s.

Instead this study proposes to marry the two distinct methods. The history of the most significant episodes in the life of the institution is recorded, but these episodes are analysed in the light of current critical thinking about the role of the museum within society. The methodology adopted therefore combines a chronological report of events with an interpretative study of these events. Marcia Pointon describes the need for such an approach in her introduction to *Art Apart*: 'there is a paucity of detailed published research which links the often wide-ranging theoretical concerns of 'museumology' with historically specific situations'.¹¹ Paula Backscheider refers to the

⁹ Frances Spalding, *The Tate: a History* (London: Tate Publishing, 1998); Jonathan Conlin, *The Nation's Mantelpiece: a History of the National Gallery* (London: Pallas Athene Arts, 2006); Charles Saumarez Smith, *The National Gallery: a Short History* (London: Frances Lincoln Ltd, 2009).

¹⁰ Peter Vergo, *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989); Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum. History, theory, politics* (London: Routledge, 1995); Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992).

¹¹ Marcia Pointon, *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology across England and North America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 3.

need to find ‘fertile facts’ when constructing a biography from the material uncovered by archival research, explaining such ‘fertile facts’ as those details that point beyond themselves and create connections with wider issues.¹² The analysis of such details will illuminate both the history of the institution itself and the wider context to which it is connected. This method is in step with the most recent trends in museum studies, as exemplified by Sharon MacDonald’s *Companion to Museum Studies*: one author in this volume advocates ‘research, which seeks to locate itself at the *intersection* of theory and practice, as opposed to a mode of critique which stands outside looking inwards’, claiming that this method ‘is best suited to capture the complexity of museums as cultural phenomena’.¹³ This study takes a holistic view of the institution, seeking to understand and contextualise as well as criticise. Andrew McClellan identifies the problem with an oppositional stance towards the institutions under scrutiny:

The negative cast of much recent museum discourse has overlooked the power of attraction that keeps people coming back to museums in record numbers; has obscured what may be construed as the ultimately positive goals of critics who are motivated by the desire for institutional reform; and as an essentially oppositional practice, has failed to acknowledge whatever reforms it may have helped bring about.¹⁴

The aim of the present study is not oppositional; rather, it seeks to present a full picture of the evolution of the institution using the documentary evidence available. This may open the way for a more critical analysis of certain aspects, and the possibility of this is raised at certain points in the text, but the essential purpose is to describe how the institution took the form it has. The study makes an innovative contribution to the field by looking in detail at a single institution over time and analysing it from multiple perspectives: it aims to produce a more nuanced understanding of how an institution responds to the complex web of competing responsibilities and expectations that are projected onto it.

It is noteworthy that much of the recent literature examining the museum as an institution has taken the form of anthology, allowing for a variety of voices to be heard and a variety of approaches to be included in a single volume. The burgeoning

¹² Paula R. Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 86, quoted in B. Caine, *Biography and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 91.

¹³ Rhiannon Mason, ‘Cultural Theory and Museum Studies’, in S. Macdonald, *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Malden, Mass; Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 29.

¹⁴ Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao* (Berkeley and Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2008), p. 7.

field of museum studies has opened the analysis of the institution to multiple methods of interpretation, and it seems appropriate to draw on several of these methods according to the event under analysis, rather than insist on observing the entire history through a single focus. The current study aims to incorporate various approaches, and to notice the relevance to the SNGMA of many different factors, both external and internal. Critical analysis is directed at those points in the chronological narrative where it seems most fruitful. The importance of different elements in the story of the evolving institution ebbs and flows over the years, with the problems of the building sometimes dominating the discussions, replaced at others by the question of how to form a national collection, or how best to present modern art to the public. The narrative will therefore be interrupted at these relevant moments to analyse the specific circumstances using the most appropriate methodologies.

The official International Council of Museums' (ICOM) definition of a museum states:

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.¹⁵

The definition highlights the principal functions, namely to acquire, to conserve, to research, to communicate and to exhibit. These diverse functions are inextricably linked – no single function can thrive without the others. In order to acquire and conserve and exhibit works, and be able to research and communicate about those works, it is essential to have an adequate building. Once that is achieved, there are many choices to be made about precisely which works to collect. How these works are then displayed affects the impact that the institution can make. The history of the SNGMA demonstrates at every stage how important it is to maintain a balance between the various functions, although it will become clear that the need for adequate space is paramount, and lack of such space stunts the institution's ability to grow to its full potential.

¹⁵ <http://icom.museum/who-we-are/the-vision/museum-definition.html> [accessed 26 April, 2011]

Background to the GMA type

Germain Bazin, the first scholar to chronicle the evolution of museums, claimed that: ‘The creation of museums devoted to modern art is one of the most significant developments in museology’.¹⁶ A brief overview of the history of the public art museum will serve to highlight the multiple functions that could be assigned to it, and reveal why there came to be a perceived need for a separate gallery-type dedicated exclusively to modern art. This background will enable us to identify better the specific factors that affected the SNGMA.

It is generally agreed that the history of the public art museum started with the opening of the Louvre in 1783, a product of both the French Revolution and the Enlightenment.¹⁷ Its influence was so strong that many of the features and principles it established subsequently informed all future public galleries. It retained all the splendour it had as the French royal collection but this was now shared by the whole nation, not simply the monarch. Thus from the start, a central function of the public art gallery was to enhance the nation to which it belonged, and it became an important component in the formation of national identity. Indeed, when the National Gallery opened in London in 1824 in a house on Pall Mall, unfavourable comparisons were frequently made with the palace of the Louvre, and the disquiet was expressed in terms of a lack of national dignity.¹⁸

The first official move towards introducing contemporary works into a museum setting occurred at the *Musée des Artistes Vivants*, which opened in the former royal residence at the Luxembourg Palace in 1818.¹⁹ This was a political gesture by the restored monarch, Louis XVIII, and has many political connotations, but nevertheless it was essentially a public museum collecting and displaying works by living artists, and as such the first of its kind. It was principally intended as a resource for artists, providing the best examples of contemporary works for study purposes. There was, however, one crucial aspect to its conception – it was envisaged as a ‘*musée de*

¹⁶ Germain Bazin, *The Museum Age*, translated by Jane van Nuis Cahill (New York: Universe Books Inc., 1967), p. 216.

¹⁷ See Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics and the Origins of the Museum in 18th Century Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹⁸ See Brandon Taylor, *Art for the Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), Chap. 2.

¹⁹ See Jesus Pedro Lorente, *Cathedrals of Urban Modernity* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1994), Chap. 2.

passage', with the best works eventually destined to pass into the permanent collection at the Louvre. The institution thus functioned at an intermediate level between a conserving museum and a display gallery: it had the power to confer status on the works chosen for inclusion in its collection, but not the responsibility for permanence. Works were held for eternity only by the Louvre. Didier Maleuvre explains: 'the museum conveys upon artefacts the sanctity of an eternal judgment'.²⁰ In the case of the Luxembourg, the responsibility for eternal judgment was deferred, allowing for the 'test of time' to take place. It resembled the Louvre as an exhibition space, and acted as an ante-chamber to it. Initially it collected exclusively French works, as its purpose was to strengthen the national school.

It took until the opening of the Tate Gallery in London in 1897 for Britain to acquire a similar gallery for the national school. It had long been argued that Britain needed such an institution if it was to demonstrate its status as a cultural centre, but there was never sufficient political will to dedicate the necessary funding. It finally came into being thanks to the generosity of Henry Tate, acting in a spirit of patriotic philanthropy tied to a desire for social standing.²¹ The Tate was officially entitled the National Gallery of British Art, and its remit was to show the historical British art collection, but it was also charged with the responsibility for forming a collection of works by the best contemporary British artists.

In their earliest form, therefore, museums of modern art were conceived to provide a showcase primarily for the work of native artists; there was a close correlation between modern art and local art. This was broken first by the work of German curators. Hugo von Tschudi extended the range of contemporary works on display first in the Nationalgalerie in Berlin and then at the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. He began acquiring works by the still-controversial French Impressionists in the 1890s, and progressed into post-Impressionism during the early years of the twentieth century. These collections threw into relief the shortcomings of both the Luxembourg and the Tate, which had failed to remain engaged with contemporary trends. Having been founded to promote their national schools, neither of these institutions showed the latest modern art if that was considered too avant-garde. The national schools

²⁰ Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 12.

²¹ See Taylor, Chap. 4 and Lorente, Chap. 3.

were being represented only in their most academic form, rather than acknowledging the full spectrum of contemporary art production.²²

On a smaller scale, many provincial towns in Britain were equally attracted by the prospect of enhancing their civic prestige through the founding of museums and art galleries, often thanks to donations from local philanthropists. These regional galleries took pride in showing the works of local artists, and unlike the National Galleries, whose role was seen as preserving historically canonised art for the nation, were pleased to show contemporary works.²³

The circumstances that lay behind the calls for a SNGMA combine aspects of all three levels of representation: there was an ambition for the national prestige that could be gained from presenting a permanent collection of the best works of international art, a patriotic desire to show works by national artists, and a more local interest common to regional galleries in wanting to provide the opportunity to view works by local artists. The double purpose of providing a cultural focal point for locally-produced works, and enhancing the country's national status remains a constant theme in Scotland's quest for its own gallery for modern art. The institution straddles the borders between international, national and local, creating a unique mixture of contradictions that makes it such an interesting example.

In addition to the tension between showing national and international works, the radical changes within art itself at the start of the twentieth century made it increasingly difficult to reconcile the idea of showing modern art in traditional museum settings. Wilhelm von Bode, Director of the Nationalgalerie in Berlin at the end of the nineteenth century, had begun experimenting with 'period rooms', and carried this through into the display of modern works.²⁴ The setting for these came to resemble contemporary domestic interiors rather than regal palaces: the densely packed hangs were replaced with fewer works being shown in smaller rooms. The examples in Germany indicated that modern art was best served by being displayed in a different setting to that offered by the conventional museum.

²² See Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), Chap. 3.

²³ See Lorente, Chap. 1.

²⁴ See Klonk, Chap. 3.

Already therefore we can identify two opposing strands in the formation of separate modern art galleries. On the one hand, these are intended as the ante-chamber for a historic collection, while on the other they point to a need for an entirely different concept of the museum, a radical re-interpretation of the notion of an art gallery.

The example that came to be held as the model for all subsequent GMAs was the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Its origins have been thoroughly documented both from within and by external observers.²⁵ The importance of this initiative was not underestimated, but the apparent paradox between ‘museum’ and ‘modern’ was noted:

When the Museum of Modern Art opened its doors on November 7, 1929, the brave new experiment was generally greeted as a cultural event of the first order. Nevertheless, many observers took a guarded view of the enterprise, for an apparent contradiction still existed in some minds between the productions of the modern avant-garde and the historical perspectives and custodial functions associated with traditional art museums.²⁶

Initially MoMA intended to adopt a ‘*musée de passage*’ approach: ‘... a special relationship between the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum, modeled after that between the Musée Luxembourg and the Musée du Louvre in Paris, had been envisaged ...’.²⁷ Awareness of the implications this would have for the collection led Barr to formulate his ‘torpedo through time’ diagram, with ‘its nose the ever advancing present, its tail the ever receding past’.²⁸ This approach was officially abandoned in 1952, but the underlying paradox between holding works in perpetuity and representing the modern has never been resolved.

It has become commonplace in museum history to refer to the multiple genealogies that can be traced for most institutions. Within the field of modern art galleries, the multiple genealogies address the two irreconcilable qualities of ‘museum’ and ‘modern’ in different ways. At one extreme, the emphasis rests firmly on the ‘museum’, retaining the notion of a temple dedicated to art, detached from the world of the everyday, providing a sacred space in which to contemplate and worship the

²⁵ H.S. Bee and M. Elligott, *Art in Our Time: a Chronicle of the Museum of Modern Art*, (New York: Publications Department of the Museum of Modern Art, 2004); S.G. Kantor, *Alfred H Barr Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002).

²⁶ Sam Hunter, *The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The history and the collection*. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), p. 9.

²⁷ Barbara Ross (ed.), *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: Continuity and Change* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1995), p. 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

works on display, exactly like the traditional museum of historic art. At the other extreme, prominence is placed on 'modern', and the method of display seeks to highlight the different type of art by presenting it in novel ways. By the 1920s these novel approaches to display came to encompass the notion of the laboratory, where the process of making art was given meaning. The art object ceased to be a fetishised item to be viewed principally in a spirit of private awe and reverence, and became something to be observed more clinically. In this laboratory-type exhibition space, the experience of viewing art became public; it proposed a collective enjoyment of art closer to the type of experience offered at world fairs, or even funfairs or department stores. This correspondence has strengthened over time: David Canaday, art critic for the *New York Times*, described MoMA in 1967:

The atmosphere is not that of a place where art is offered for contemplation with the privilege of personal response. There is a goading to accept the offered product as the only acceptable one... the whole place, now grown to great size, is one enormous boutique.²⁹

These extremes - modern and museum, public and private, temple and laboratory, place of contemplation and place of commerce - form some of the essential contradictions underlying any museum of modern art. The contradictions vary in emphasis in different institutions at different times, but they are always present, and recognising where the emphasis is placed will assist our assessment of the SNGMA. At the same time, as the modern art museum evolved, the focus shifted from an initial concentration on native artists to a broader international perspective.

The museum of modern art may be regarded as the quintessential museum-type of the twentieth century, encapsulating within its very title the dominant artistic ideology that persisted for at least the first fifty years of the century. Yet it is perhaps the most problematic of all museum types because of the multiple tensions and irreconcilable dilemmas that lie at its heart. 'In historicizing the present, the museum [referring to MoMA] creates both retrospect and teleology.'³⁰ A detailed examination of the SNGMA, taking into account the particular set of circumstances behind it, will provide insights into how it has dealt with these tensions. Comparisons to other institutions such as the Tate and MoMA, and to smaller museums like the Louisiana

²⁹ David Canaday, 'Art: 39 Steps from Mission House to Boutique', in *New York Times*, 4 June 1967, p. 25, and quoted in Nancy Einreinhofer, *The American Art Museum: Elitism and Democracy* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), p. 182.

³⁰ Griselda Pollock, 'Un-Framing the Modern: Critical Space/Public Possibility', in Pollock and Zemans (eds.), *Museums after Modernism* (Malden, Mass; Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 6.

outside Copenhagen or the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, will demonstrate where the SNGMA sought to locate itself within the wider international field of GMAs.

The specifics of Scotland's GMA

Scotland began to make claims for establishing its own museum of modern art at the start of the twentieth century. The claims initially centred on reasserting Scotland's national cultural status, and on the perceived need to provide a platform for the works of Scottish artists, to reveal the intrinsic qualities of a Scottish national school. Over time, however, these intentions were superseded and replaced with others that reflected a growing internationalism in modern art, and a realisation that key innovations were happening elsewhere. In the earliest discussions, it is difficult to extricate the notion of a Gallery of Modern Art from a Gallery of Scottish art; it was an interchangeable idea, as seen in a comment in the *Art Journal* of 1897, referring to proposed changes to the National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) and the RSA:

In Venice the visitor can study Venetian Art, and in the Paris Luxembourg, French Art. With the Chantrey pictures and Henry Tate collection in London for England; and with nearly all the other European capitals similarly furnished; Scotland has hitherto been very badly represented in its own capital, and it has been well-nigh impossible to see fair examples of modern work except in the less important rooms of the National Gallery.³¹

This comment reveals the close connection between the background to the SNGMA and the broader history of the NGS, which in the early 1900s were undergoing intense scrutiny. There was widespread dissatisfaction with the existing system of administration, still under the control of the so-called Board of Manufactures. This Board of Trustees had been formed in 1727 to administer the annual grant of £2,000 conceded to Scotland under the Treaty of Union of 1707, but it was no longer deemed appropriate for the purpose of governing the NGS.³² Dissatisfaction focused on the

³¹ 'Art in Scotland', *The Art Journal*, January 1897, p. 23.

³² An excellent account of the establishment of the Board of Trustees can be found in a footnote to *Sir John Clerk's Memoirs*, (available at <http://www.archive.org/details/memoirsoflifeofs13cler>), written by John Miller Gray in 1892, and originally published by The Scottish History Society. Grey states: 'By the fifteenth article of the Treaty of Union, it was enacted that £2000 per annum should, for some years, be applied towards the encouragement and promotion of fisheries, manufactures, and improvements in Scotland, as an equivalent for the increase of duties of Customs and Excise. In 1718 this sum was made payable for ever out of the Customs and Excise in Scotland... In 1727 [...] his Majesty King George I issued letters-patent for the appointment of a Board of (twenty-one) Trustees, with power to administer the fund... In 1847 an Act was passed enabling the Treasury to appropriate the funds towards the purposes of education in the fine arts generally... The National Gallery of Scotland and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery were placed under the control of the Board when they were founded in 1850 and 1883; and when the Museum of the Society of Antiquaries was made

mismanagement of the problem of space within the National Gallery, and on the Board's inadequate attempts to secure funding from central government. These topics were widely discussed both in the local press and in parliamentary debates. The debates reveal the strength of resentment at the perceived unfairness towards Scotland, particularly when compared with the treatment of Dublin's National Gallery of Ireland.³³

This account alerts us to what will remain a constant tension at the heart of the SNGMA. For many people the correct interpretation of the title is a national gallery showing modern Scottish art; the connection between local and modern has remained strong, and the public perception is that the local representation is inadequate, leading to frequent criticism of the institution for failing to perform its duty. This study will try to determine the extent to which the original ambiguity of intention has remained unresolved, looking in particular at the choices made regarding acquisitions and exhibitions, including the early decision not to accept the collection gathered by the Scottish Modern Arts Association.

It proved relatively simple to resolve the complaint about funding for the National Gallery, whereas the problem of space has remained central to the difficulties facing the organisation throughout the entire period. The particular constraints of Edinburgh's cityscape have frequently been used as an excuse for not finding new or alternative sites for important cultural facilities, and the case of the Gallery of Modern Art provides one of the most manifest examples of this. The problem of finding a suitable site for the proposed new gallery delayed the opening of this institution for almost fifty years, and the drawbacks of the eventual sites chosen have greatly affected how the Gallery has developed, creating the need for significant compromises.

The seemingly interminable delays allowed for lengthy discussion about what form the proposed Gallery of Modern Art should take. These discussions provide an intriguing insight into where Scotland chose to locate itself in relation to international trends over the course of the century. Under Stanley Cursiter, Director of NGS from

over to the nation in 1851, this also was committed to the direction of the Board.' (p. 132-3). I am most grateful to Dr. Iain Gordon Brown for this reference.

³³ 'In the present case the claim of Scotland is simple. It is a claim for at least equal treatment with Ireland in respect of the National Gallery.' *Scotsman*, 28 June 1902.

1929 to 1948, and a vigorous proponent of a separate gallery of modern art, the vision corresponded to a Bauhaus-type 'art centre'. He proposed linking the display of visual arts with other forms of artistic activity to create a vibrant and dynamic space distinct from the National Gallery. At the time of its opening in 1960, however, the then Director, David Baxandall, proposed a more traditional approach to filling the restricted space available at Inverleith House, with the Gallery of Modern Art acting as a logical continuation of the historic collection at the National Gallery. The Gallery's first Keeper, Douglas Hall, who was appointed in 1961, recognised the growing discrepancy between the desires and expectations of the local audience and the developing trends in international museums, but remained committed to a strategy that involved gently winning over the public to modern art rather than imposing the extremes of fashion onto them. This contrasts with the approach adopted by some smaller European museums, such as the Städtisches Museum in Mönchengladbach, whose curator openly admitted ignoring the local context.³⁴ The deference towards the perceived taste of the local audience may have prevented the Gallery from truly engaging with contemporary art. It represents a particular choice to locate the Gallery within the mainstream of cultural affairs rather than in the vanguard: such a choice may derive from the personal preferences of the Director, but these in turn are influenced by his interpretation of the local and international context, and by his pragmatic assessment of what was achievable.

The opening of the SNGMA at Inverleith House in 1960 coincided with a volatile moment in art, when avant-garde artists were deliberately rejecting the institutional context. Movements such as Fluxus, Assemblage Art, Happenings, and subsequently Conceptual Art were intentionally very difficult to incorporate into a traditional gallery setting. The timing made the task of establishing an appropriately progressive identity even more difficult, as the gallery was still struggling to represent a 'modern' that was already past, at a time when the present 'modern' was changing course quite radically. This meant that although the SNGMA had the distinction of being the first national gallery in the United Kingdom dedicated to modern art, it was not showing the cutting-edge modern art of the day. The conflict between modern and contemporary is felt by all modern art galleries, but the fact that the Scottish institution has spent most of its fifty years trying to catch up with already established

³⁴ 'I never made any concessions to the taste of the public, or gave room to derivative art in any of the exhibitions I organised.' Interview with Johannes Cladders in Hans-Ulrich Obrist (ed.), *A Brief History of Curating* (Zurich: JRP| Ringier, 2008), p. 54.

art, has reinforced the impression of its conservative nature. Observing the internal struggles that took place about how best to confront the contemporary reality will help to explain some of the choices that were made.

Opening so late in the twentieth century, the Gallery faced a mammoth task of trying to compile a representative collection of modern art, particularly when its budget was severely limited in the early years. It chose to adopt a policy of slowly building up a collection of works of the highest possible quality. It is generally agreed that the Scottish Gallery has achieved some remarkable successes, and now possesses a collection with areas of outstanding strengths. The process of forming such a collection from scratch is recorded in detail, with at times heated discussions regarding policy decisions. A close analysis of these records will give an unusual insight into the challenges that institutions must confront. It shows clearly how the competing interests of 'modern' and 'contemporary', and Scottish and international have been handled, and the extent to which one being favoured over the other has shifted at different moments in the history.

Despite its limited size the gallery has always aspired to build an international reputation through its collections, its exhibitions and its publications, and it has gained respect for the quality of all of these elements. Much credit for this goes to some shrewd decisions about which priorities to favour at different moments. As it became clear that it would not be possible to achieve the universal coverage that was initially intended, the focus shifted instead to building on certain key areas of strengths, leading ultimately to the creation of a world-class collection of Surrealist art. This was achieved in part thanks to major bequests and donations, which were often the result of close, personal relationships built up with the institution. The scale of the SNGMA played a key role in facilitating these relationships: it is not a vast, faceless organisation with an impersonal administration. Scale can be a major determinant for a gallery; it is difficult to determine how much the relatively small size contributed to the gallery's success, or, conversely, to what extent it prevented it from achieving more.

The exhibitions programme was equally significant in forging an identity for the institution. Although in the early days, exhibitions were necessary simply to fill the walls, they soon became an important instrument for raising the profile of the gallery,

and several of them received glowing reviews. The limited space at the Gallery's first home in Inverleith House restricted the range of works that could be shown, but by choosing carefully which artists and works to show, the particular intimate quality enhanced many displays. The move to larger premises in 1984 allowed for a wider range of exhibitions, fulfilling the aim to introduce international modern art to Scotland. An examination of both the temporary exhibitions and the approach adopted to the display of works from the permanent collection will provide greater understanding of how the Gallery interpreted its role within the community.

Critics of museums as institutions usually point to examples from some of the world's largest institutions, such as MoMA or Paris's Pompidou Centre, to illustrate the negative trends they have identified.³⁵ The question arises of whether similar criticisms can be levelled against a small institution, or does it have fewer responsibilities and is therefore less open to such criticism? Administratively the SNGMA is part of the larger organisation of the NGS as set up under the 1906 National Galleries of Scotland Act.³⁶ Its position within that wider organisation has shifted through time, from moments of almost complete autonomy to periods of greater subordination. It is important to note how this relationship has affected the institution, and to question whether or not it has benefited from this organisational structure.

The SNGMA has always had to perform multiple roles, providing a platform for Scottish art of the twentieth century (and beyond), bringing international modern art to the Scottish public, forming a collection that brings prestige to the nation, educating the Scottish people to recognise and appreciate modern art from the start of the twentieth century onwards. It is now also expected to perform a role as a magnet for international tourism, increasing Edinburgh's, and Scotland's, range of tourist attractions. It has performed all this with limited resources of money and staff. A detailed analysis of its evolution and growth should explain how this has been possible.

³⁵ For example, Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995) and Jean Baudrillard, 'The Beaubourg-Effect: Implosion and Deterrence', in *October*, Vol. 20, Spring 1982, pp. 3-13.

³⁶ The National Galleries of Scotland Act of 1906 had given the Board of Trustees authority to manage the National Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery. In 1959, this Act was modified to include 'the performance of such other functions as are conferred on them by or under this Act' (National Galleries of Scotland Act 1959). In this way, the new National Gallery of Modern Art became a constituent part of the NGS.

CHAPTER 1

Proposals - The Long Search

Background context

The history of the SNGMA as a separate institution begins at the start of the twentieth century. The original calls for its creation formed part of a wider debate about the public display of art at the NGS. The debates drew particular attention to two factors: the inadequate space available within the NGS and the question of how the institution should be financed. Several circumstances combined to make this a lively issue for discussion among the political and artistic communities at this time. The gradual re-awakening of Scottish national identity and a questioning of the country's relative standing within the United Kingdom led to an examination of the processes currently in place for the financing of the arts within the separate components of the Union. The issue was first raised in a House of Commons' debate in 1902, when the Scottish members expressed their concern at the unfavourable treatment of Scotland's National Gallery compared to the comparable institution in Ireland. Sir Andrew Agnew, M.P. for Edinburgh South, expressed the opinion of many:

If it was desirable for Ireland that it should have a sum of this kind to spend yearly in the purchase of new pictures, it must surely be desirable for Scotland, and probably they would have got the money before if members for Scotland had persisted as members from Ireland had done in bringing the claim of their country before Parliament. Hitherto Scotland had not asked with the pertinacity with which it might have asked for the sum for this particular purpose, but now that the members for Scotland on both sides of the House were waking up [...] he hoped that the very moderate demand which they made would be granted by the Treasury.¹

Awareness of the comparative injustice and the earlier lack of diligence prompted moves to defend more strongly Scotland's interests within the United Kingdom, and a full enquiry was set up to examine the structure and the funding of the NGS. Vociferous demands were made to the Treasury on specifically nationalist grounds, aimed at protecting the interests of Scotland in the arts. Sir James Guthrie, in his role as President of the Royal Scottish Academy (RSA), wrote an open letter to all the Scottish Members of Parliament to enlist their support:

¹ Report of House of Commons debate, *Scotsman*, 27 June 1902.

It has long been well known to all interested in the subject that Scotland has not received its due share of the sums which have been voted by Parliament for the promotion of art in the three kingdoms...

It is not necessary to argue that one of the functions of Government is to promote the study and practice of the arts which exercise a beneficent influence in ameliorating the lives of the people. That has long been accepted by all parties in the State as one of the duties resting on the Government of the country. It may fairly be stated that that duty can only be properly discharged in the circumstances of the United Kingdom by making adequate provision for the promotion of art in each of the three kingdoms.²

This illustrates an important element in the complex identity of the Scottish Gallery. It is a national gallery, but belonging to a country which does not have full control of the decisions taken regarding such national institutions. The awakening interest in the subject at the start of the century was clearly informed by a growing sense of national identity: 'Scotland has been asserting her right recently to a greater State recognition in art than she has received since the Union...'³

The discussions surrounding the future of Scotland's art collection were reported on various fronts. An article in *The Studio* in 1904 voiced the generally held concern that the country was in danger of losing its native talent:

For long it has been felt by those interested that if Scotland were not to become a mere annex to London, and a source of supply for London exhibitions and societies with some of their best work and some of their most talented members, something must be done to put the national galleries upon a sounder footing, and to provide adequate accommodation for a really representative exhibition of Scottish art...⁴

The relationship to London mentioned here adds a further layer of complexity to the SNGMA's sense of identity. It was important for Scotland not to be swallowed up into the wider arena of the London 'national' institutions, which were nominally British, but were frequently accused of being 'English'. Scotland did not have to assert itself on an international stage so much as establish its identity within the British context. The need to maintain a distinct identity from London has permeated many aspects of the Gallery's development. The ebb and flow of rivalry and collaboration with London, and the Tate in particular, is a persistent theme in this institutional history. The SNGMA was established to provide a similar service for Scotland to that performed by the Tate for Britain.

² 'The Claims of Scotland on the Government in relation to Art', *Scotsman*, 2 July 1904.

³ *The Studio*, March 1908, p. 134.

⁴ *The Studio*, January 1904, p. 346.

The desire to establish a gallery showing specifically modern art coincided with a particularly vigorous moment for Scottish art. Already at the turn of the twentieth century there were various avant-garde trends within Scottish art, from the Glasgow School that had produced the ‘Glasgow Boys’, who adopted the modern French style of painting, to Patrick Geddes’s Old Edinburgh School of Art, where art exploring a distinctive Scottish and Celtic identity was developed.⁵ At the same time many Scottish artists were conscious of the predominantly conservative nature of the RSA and wanted to adopt a more radical approach to art. This had led to the establishment of the Society of Scottish Artists in 1891, promoting a more modern, less academic, style of art. Their annual exhibitions came to form an important contribution to the dissemination of new artistic trends, most famously in their 1913 exhibition, which featured Futurists and Post-Impressionists works.⁶ On the whole, therefore, the artistic situation was vigorous and outward looking, with many artists actively interested in developments in France and Germany in particular, travelling there and studying with more radical painters. Scottish artists achieved considerable success internationally, and many Scottish collectors were open to modern continental developments. In Glasgow, the success of Alexander Reid, the dealer who introduced works particularly of the Barbizon school to Scottish collectors, meant there was considerable public interest in more modern art than was regularly represented in the Academy, leading to a desire for a national collection within Scotland that contained works by the more innovative artists of the day. Already in 1905, a review of the Paris Salon in *The Scotsman* stated:

The distribution by our Government of modern works of art among provincial galleries is a thing unknown upon this side of the Channel; in France however it is a yearly occurrence... When will the best works of our Scottish artists be systematically purchased by the State or by municipalities for exhibition in national or provincial galleries for the enjoyment of present and future generations of Scotsmen?⁷

Interest in promoting native artists was part of a general climate of cultural nationalism. Pride in the achievements of Scottish artists and the recognition their works were given in Europe caused growing resentment at the lack of adequate representation of Scots in the supposedly ‘National Gallery of Modern Art’, as the Tate was officially called. The Tate Gallery had been set up in 1897 as a part of the

⁵ Murdo Macdonald, *Celticism and Internationalism in the Circle of Patrick Geddes*, http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/uploads/docs/s6_20.pdf, p. 72. [accessed 27 April 2011]

⁶ See Anne Wishart, *The Society of Scottish Artists: the First 100 Years* (Edinburgh: The Society, 1991).

⁷ ‘The Paris Salon’, *Scotsman*, 5 May 1905.

National Gallery specifically to represent ‘the British school’. The guidelines already drawn up in the 1835 Select Committee’s report made provision for this: ‘Pictures by living British artists of acknowledged merit might, after they have stood the test of time and criticism, be purchased for the national collection...’⁸ It was increasingly felt, however, that ‘British’ did not stretch beyond the borders of England. The ‘national’ frame was open to different interpretations, and the general perception in Scotland was that Scottish artists were not receiving the credit they deserved from the supposed ‘national’ institution.

It has been only too clear that there is an impression in the South that the word “British” is synonymous with “English”.... On more than one occasion it has been necessary to point out that the National and Tate Galleries in London are not English but British, and that the works of Scottish artists should find places there, not as a matter of favour, but of right.... [At the moment]... little note is taken of the majority of those Artists who are considered by Scotsmen to be an essential part of their national artistic asset. They are accepted in provincial galleries and especially in Paris – but not in British national collections.⁹

The first step in disseminating knowledge of Scotland’s national art should logically have been its display in a national collection within Scotland. The fundamental problem with this solution, however, lay in the practical issue of space, which was already causing problems within the NGS. The Gallery was located in a prestigious building but it offered no possibility for expansion.¹⁰ This represented a major obstacle to future development. John Stirling-Maxwell described the problem during a parliamentary debate:

The condition of the National Gallery was such that no reasonable person would dream of giving or bequeathing a picture to the institution, because it had no room in which to place pictures well, and no possibility of expansion. He would also do well to remember that students of pictures going to the Gallery in Edinburgh had to go on their hands and knees, and climb a ladder, to look at pictures which, in any other gallery in Europe, they would find well hung, in good space, and on a level with their eyes.¹¹

There may have been some hyperbole in this description, but it conveys the overcrowded nature of the displays that therefore left no space for modern works. Many people felt the obvious solution was to move to a location that would permit expansion.

⁸ Quoted in Spalding, p. 10.

⁹ 1st Annual Report of Scottish Modern Art Association, 1908, ED003/2/2.

¹⁰ Advances in structural engineering and building techniques have since allowed for major extensions to be added below ground, but these were not foreseeable at the start of the 20th century.

¹¹ Report of House of Commons debate, *Scotsman*, 10 August 1904. The site also had another unusual shortcoming: it suffered from the movement of the trains passing in the tunnel over which it was built. This point was made by the Edinburgh M.P., Mr Graham Murray in the reported debate: ‘the position of the present National Gallery is not very good for pictures, because of the vibrations caused by trains passing underneath the Mound.’

The enquiry set up following the parliamentary debate of 1902 focused its attention on the administration of the National Gallery, in particular on the role played by the Board of Manufactures. This body, as mentioned on page 13, had been formed in 1727 to administer the annuity of £2,000 granted to Scotland under the 1707 Treaty of Union. By the start of the twentieth century, the members of the Board were charged with running several different institutions, and their suitability for the task was called into question. A letter to the *Scotsman* warned that the enquiry would serve no purpose, however, if it ignored the problem of space: 'It is little use to rearrange the administration, and no use at all to vote money to buy more pictures unless there is a proper building to house the artistic treasures the nation already possesses'.¹² This observation refers directly to the difficulties at the NGS, but it neatly summarises the problem that will impede the establishment of a Gallery of Modern Art for over half a century. The practical issues of finding space within the city and receiving adequate political and financial backing to appropriate that space for the needs of modern art are central to the lengthy delays in realising the project.

The difficulty of finding suitable sites to build cultural institutions in Edinburgh was well known: the ongoing saga of locating the Usher Hall had brought this to public attention.¹³ Nevertheless, some other options were considered, principally the prospect of moving the National Gallery to the Royal High School building at the foot of Calton Hill. Graham Murray presented the argument for this proposal:

There is one site ... That is the Royal High School, which is situated on a plateau under Calton Hill, just beyond Edinburgh jail. It is a classical and beautiful building. It stands on a plateau where there is a good deal of room, and there would be a good deal of room for extension. It is a building which, as it happens, being of one storey, after a Greek model, could remarkably easily be adapted to a picture gallery. Probably there is no actual building which with so little money could be changed from its present purposes into a picture gallery.¹⁴

It is relevant to later developments regarding a venue for the SNGMA to notice that Edinburgh was already looking at ways of adapting its architectural heritage; the first suggestion for re-housing the National Gallery proposed converting an existing building to the purpose. With such a deeply ingrained tradition of re-using buildings,

¹² *Scotsman*, 23 November 1903.

¹³ 'Those who have followed Edinburgh municipal politics at all have only to reflect on the sad history of the search for a site for the Usher Hall to know that it is so.' Report of House of Commons debate, *Scotsman*, 10 August 1904.

¹⁴ Report of House of Commons debate, *Scotsman*, 10 August 1904.

it is perhaps not surprising that a new-built gallery has remained so elusive. The Royal High site was seen to offer many advantages, not least the possibility of unlimited expansion because of the amount of ground surrounding it. The example of the Tate Gallery in London confirmed the need to allow room for future expansion. Within the first thirteen years of its existence, two major extensions were added to the original building.¹⁵ This is the essential dilemma for any museum that expects to continue collecting: there must be some provision for expansion. It was a question that architects sought to address during the twentieth century, but it remains an unresolved dilemma.¹⁶

The enquiry resulted in the National Galleries of Scotland Act of 1906, which set up a Board of Trustees to administer the Galleries, and which sought to rationalize the space within the various buildings previously managed by the Board of Manufactures. The new Board of Trustees retained control of the National Gallery building, the Royal Institution building and the Portrait Gallery; the Act also made provisions for a College of Art to be built, and for new premises to be found for the Royal Society, allowing these institutions to vacate the Royal Institution building and thus leaving more space for the display of works of art. Michael Clarke refers to the ‘complex game of musical chairs’ when describing the accommodation arrangements within the two buildings on the Mound.¹⁷ As predicted, however, there was still not sufficient space to allow also for the display of modern art. The first concerted efforts to lobby for a separate building to house a collection of modern works came from the Scottish Modern Arts Association (SMAA), formed in 1907 once the consequences of the 1906 Act were clear. Their aims were stated in their first annual report:

¹⁵ The first extension was built after only two years, in 1899, and the second, the Duveen Gallery, in 1910. Further extensions were added in 1926, 1937, 1979 and 1987; see Helen Searing, *Art Spaces: the architecture of four Tates* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2002).

¹⁶ A notable example was by Le Corbusier, whose 1939 scheme for a Museum of Unlimited Growth was explicitly intended to overcome the problem. This project is discussed in many books on museum architecture, including Josep Maria Montaner and Jordi Oliveras, *The Museums of the Last Generation* (London; New York: Academy Editions; St Martin’s Press, 1986), p. 13.

¹⁷ M. Clarke, *The Playfair Project*, National Galleries of Scotland, 2004, p. 11. Clarke explains: ‘The National Gallery and the Royal Scottish Academy originally shared the Gallery building, the former occupying the western side and the latter the two main suites of octagonal rooms on the eastern side of the building... Following the National Galleries of Scotland Act of 1906... a Parliamentary Order of 1910 (‘The Appropriation of Building’) removed the Academicians from the Gallery building and gave them permanent tenancy of office space in the Institution building and the right to hold an annual exhibition there. The Institution was thereafter to be known as the ‘Royal Scottish Academy’, the management of which was vested with the Trustees of the National Galleries of Scotland.’

The objects of the association are to ensure the preservation of representative examples of Scottish art, more particularly by acquiring works of contemporary Scottish artists, and also to assist in the enriching of Scottish public art collections. These objects are to be attained by the acquisition of works of art by Scottish painters, sculptors, gravers, or other craftsmen; the acquisition of works of art by artists other than Scottish, the exhibition of works so acquired, the endeavour to secure adequate representation of Scottish art in British national collections, and the furtherance of any scheme which shall have for its object the promotion of modern Scottish art.¹⁸

The initial aims were wide-ranging, but the Association soon focused more specifically on the desire to establish a separate modern art gallery within Scotland. The arguments in favour of this solution often made proud reference to Scotland's more progressive approach to art. In the report of the annual meeting of the SMAA in February 1908, Mr F.T. Cooper, K.C. was quoted as commenting that:

One of the last parts of the world to know what Scottish art really is was the knuckle-end of Scotland attached south of the Tweed. The English were much slower at appreciating these things than almost any other civilised people in the world. On the Continent Scottish art was recognised, and had its position – a position he might say much more assured than the position of English art. It had been a great reproach in the past that the stranger coming to our land was unable to see any public collection of typical specimens of what Scottish artists could do.¹⁹

Despite the jocularly jingoistic tone of this statement, there was a serious underlying message regarding the widespread appreciation of Scottish art abroad, and a growing call for a public collection to be housed within Scotland. Scotland wanted to extend its artistic frame beyond the apparently narrow confines of England. As an example highlighting the pre-eminence of Scotland's artists, the first acquisition by the newly founded association was a landscape by E.A. Walton; the press report of this purchase included the information that 'it was this picture... that had been awarded the gold medal at the international exhibition of art at Munich last year'.²⁰

In the 4th Annual Report (1911), the Chairman of the SMAA stated: '.... the time is not far distant when there will exist in Scotland a collection of pictures, housed in one building, which will be representative of Modern Art, and more particularly, Scottish Modern Art, in its most characteristic phases'.²¹ Such confidence related to the opening in 1912 of the newly extended NGS: it was believed that there would now be sufficient momentum to establish a new gallery showing contemporary works. That

¹⁸ 1st Annual Report of Scottish Modern Arts Association, 1908, ED003/2/2-7.

¹⁹ 'The Recognition of Scottish Art', *Scotsman*, 19 February 1908.

²⁰ 'Scottish Modern Arts Association's First Acquisition', *Scotsman*, 28 March 1907.

²¹ ED003/2/2.

year the SMAA reached an agreement with the RSA that the SMAA could house their growing collection temporarily in two rooms of the newly refurbished RSA galleries on the Mound when these were not being used for the RSA's annual show. This was seen as a major breakthrough, demonstrating recognition of the need for a public collection to be displayed. It was decided that the collection could then tour around Scotland during the four months of the RSA exhibitions. There was widespread interest in the collection from various parts of the country; the SMAA records show requests for loans from many local authorities, including Paisley, Aberdeen and Perth in Scotland, and Carlisle in England. This solution shows a remarkable similarity to what has emerged as today's Artist Rooms scheme, as discussed in Chapter 6.

The temporary display solution, however, quickly proved inadequate. A letter to the *Scotsman* in 1913, commenting on the decision in Dublin to proceed with a National Gallery to house the Lane bequest, urged that the same should be done in Scotland:

Surely it is about time the City of Edinburgh began to consider seriously having a Gallery for Modern Art. Our modern art collections, housed for eight months of the year in two rooms of the Scottish Academy galleries, show how much can be done in a few years by a little quiet enthusiasm; but the present arrangement is only temporary, as in a short time there will not be room to do justice to our pictures, which we consider good, and would not like placed where they will not be seen. Please note, we do not aim at having only Scottish modern art; we are endeavouring to have works from all parts – modern art is cosmopolitan.²²

Throughout the process of establishing a GMA, there is tension between the city of Edinburgh and the British government about who should assume the responsibility. As Scotland's capital, Edinburgh felt entitled to have national institutions funded by central government in Westminster, but many local people also felt that the city had a responsibility to its local artists and patrons to look after their interests more directly.

The following year, the report by the Chairman of the SMAA expressed disappointment that no breakthrough in obtaining a permanent home for the collection had been achieved, and an awareness that the momentum might be slipping.²³ The organisation was made up largely of professionals, mainly lawyers

²² 'An Edinburgh Gallery of Modern Art', *Scotsman*, 28 March 1913.

²³ 'Crisis in the Association's History': commenting on the undeniable results attained over the first seven years of its existence, Archibald Stodart Walker warned that: "... he believed they had come to a crisis in the history of the Association. They could quite well go on as they had been doing over the past seven years, but he thought the time had arrived to let their imagination have a swing, and to

and doctors, and landed gentry: the executive Board in 1914 consisted of the President, Lord Glenconner, with Mr Patrick Ford, Advocate, as Vice-President, and with Sir Thomas Glen Coats, Sir Oliver Riddell and the Honourable Lord Salvesen as honorary vice-presidents, and Dr Archibald Stodart Walker as Chairman. The initial level of determination to grow as much as possible was not sustained during the war years that followed, and indeed much of the early enthusiasm was lost over the ensuing period. It became increasingly difficult to uphold the momentum for the enterprise when there was still no prospect of a permanent home. The Association remained committed to building up a collection of representative works, although this became almost exclusively of Scottish artists. The issue of purchasing works by foreign artists was still considered, but usually passed over in favour of Scottish works.²⁴

The Association continued collecting, but their failure to find an adequate venue began to impinge on their ability to secure gifts and bequests. This is a frequent complaint from museums, that lack of space prevents potential donors from bequeathing works to them, and had been already noted at the NGS in the 1902 debates. The pressing need for a building was restated at each annual meeting, but the difficulty of finding a site remained insurmountable. The SMAA had to work hard to maintain public interest; by the early 1920s, membership had declined, so in 1925 they organised a recruitment evening to enhance the public's awareness of the Association and its aims, and to encourage new membership. The event was widely publicised in the Scottish press, and everything possible was done to facilitate attendance, including special transport arrangements: 'for the convenience of guests from the West, a special train will leave Waverley Station, Edinburgh at 11.15pm, arriving in Glasgow, Queen Street at 12.15'.²⁵ The importance of the West of Scotland in furthering the cause of a GMA was not ignored: the competition between Scotland's two major cities adds another element to the national question. Edinburgh is the capital city of Scotland, but Glasgow has a much larger population, and had already shown itself highly receptive to modern art in the early years of the century.²⁶

advance at such a rate as would compel the nation to let them have a gallery of modern art." *Scotsman*, 19 February 1914.

²⁴ A report in *The Scotsman*, 16 June 1932, stated that: 'the Association desires, first and foremost, to make known the work of living Scottish artists of distinction'.

²⁵ ED003/3/1.

²⁶ There have been suggestions at various times that Glasgow could provide a more receptive context for a gallery of modern art, and during the 1990s Glasgow was the proposed venue for a Gallery of Scottish Art.

The organisers of the event were delighted with the response: they received 830 acceptances, and the evening proved a resounding success in recruiting new members, demonstrating continuing public support for the cause.

The Association put together a considerable collection through acquisitions and bequests; by 1928 they possessed 116 paintings and works of sculpture. These were always intended to form the core of a national collection, although as the century progressed, art became more challenging, and the issue of what to purchase became less straightforward, with most members of the Association agreeing in their dislike of the avant-garde trends.²⁷

As happened so often in Edinburgh during the twentieth century, it proved difficult to bring cultural projects to completion.²⁸ Despite its best efforts, the SMAA was not successful in procuring space for a new gallery, and this came increasingly to be seen as a particular failure for the city of Edinburgh, which dented the city's civic pride.²⁹ The matter finally achieved national attention when it became part of a broader nationwide investigation into museums and galleries under the Royal Commission set up in 1927 to assess the effectiveness of all these institutions. Included in its remit was the question of the need for a GMA for Scotland, and its findings formed the basis on which the Gallery was eventually founded.

The works that had been collected by the SMAA as a basis for the national collection were not eventually used for this, for reasons that throw light onto the collecting policy adopted and how that reflected the newly-established gallery's sense of

²⁷ The SMAA Annual Report of 1948 referred to 'the low standards of art', blaming critics who 'rather than say something dull preferred to say something clever or smart about a woman with three noses and a fish hat than about a normal and technically able work of art'. The Chairman predicted that 'young artists ... were moving away from surrealism, and from the bleak, barren, sterile cages of what was called abstract art, and turning again to the sunnier plains of the more academic forms.' The 44th Annual Report from 1951 opened with a description of a recent visit to the Tate in London by the Chairman, Mr Blyth: 'One [work] was like two pea-sticks with a cabbage runt between them and a radish on top... He had looked all over for Scottish paintings, but there were none on view, although the Gallery possessed some good Scottish works, among them the finest oil picture Sir Muirhead Bone ever painted.' ED003/6/2.

²⁸ The case of the Usher Hall has already been mentioned: there was also a long delay over the building of the National Library, over finding adequate premises for the National Museum of Antiquities, and later in the century, there were long-drawn-out debates about building an Opera House.

²⁹ 'Modern Art: Edinburgh's Collection', *Scotsman*, 17 September 1927. 'Almost alone amongst the greater towns in Britain, Edinburgh has no permanent gallery devoted to modern art. ... Most of the great English towns, and within Scotland, Glasgow and Aberdeen, and in less degree, Dundee, possess galleries devoted chiefly to modern and contemporary art, while lesser centres, such as Paisley, Kirkcaldy, and Perth, are also forming collections.'

identity, as shall be discussed in Chapter 2. Instead, the bulk of the collection was donated to the City Arts Centre in 1964, when the SMAA was finally disbanded.

Stanley Cursiter

The Royal Commission on Museums and Galleries examined the needs of all cultural bodies throughout Britain. They issued their final report on the situation in Scotland in 1930, in which they acknowledged, albeit in a circuitous way, the need to find space for a Gallery of Modern Art. This was reported in *The Scotsman*:

If a separate site and building could be provided for the Museum of Antiquities, a solution of the problems ... affecting the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery and the Museum itself, would have been found. The accommodation for a Gallery of Modern Art would then be available in the space at present occupied by the Museum of Antiquities contiguous to the National Portrait Gallery.³⁰

The idea that a GMA could somehow be accommodated in the spare space created by the better housing of other collections might suggest a lack of urgent commitment to the problem of displaying modern art. In fact, the lack of urgency related more to the relative gravity of the problems currently experienced at those other institutions, in particular the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS) and the National Library, both of which were making do with inadequate interim solutions. When one considers the various national institutions competing for space and funding in the country's relatively small capital city, the need to construct an artificial hierarchy of priorities is evident. A comment made by Lord Clyde in reference to the proposed new building for the National Library, that 'there were remarkably few ideal sites to be found in Central Edinburgh' was equally relevant to all organisations hoping to expand.³¹ The particular circumstances of Edinburgh's urban geography and the lengthy planning process have delayed the expansion of several institutions, almost as much as lack of money; for the SNGMA it remains a problem up to the present.

Discussions about a separate gallery of modern art were still generating widespread enthusiasm. Speaking at a public dinner in 1930, Herbert J. Grierson, a Trustee of the

³⁰ 'Scottish National Galleries: New Building Needed for Museum of Antiquities', *Scotsman*, 16 January 1930.

³¹ 'Criticism of Trustees' Site Scheme', *Scotsman*, 17 January 1931. The history of the National Library's site is very well covered in Iain Gordon Brown's work, *Building for Books: the architectural evolution of the Advocates' Library, 1689-1925*

NGS, referred to the proposal for a new building similar to the Tate, and noted how popular such a venture would be:

The ordinary individual is interested more in modern works of art than in the historical aspect of the subject.... The Tate Gallery in London, with its interesting array of fresh and modern works of art, which are constantly being added to, is a genuine public attraction, and is made ample use of.³²

This remark highlights the stronger connection between the general public and modern art in the first decades of the twentieth century. The general public were interested in seeing the latest paintings. Modern art was not yet regarded with suspicion and scorn, as was soon to be the case.

The spokesperson for the NGS at this time was Stanley Cursiter. Cursiter had trained as an artist and had been instrumental in introducing works of post-impressionist and futurist art to the 1913 Scottish Society of Artists (SSA) exhibition. Following the established tradition of appointing practising artists as Keepers, Cursiter had been appointed Keeper at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery (SNPG) in 1925. He had recently been promoted to the role of Director of the NGS following the retirement of Sir James Caw, and he rejected outright the suggestion of inserting a modern art gallery into the SNPG building. His experience there convinced him that it would not make a suitable gallery for modern art, and he reported his thoughts to the Board of Trustees. They wrote to the Commissioners, pointing out that the only area of that building with roof-lighting was the top floor, where there was very little space available, and that the side-lit galleries on the ground and first floor were unsatisfactory for displaying paintings.³³

A Standing Committee was established to continue the work begun by the Royal Commission, and in June 1933, the Secretary, John Beresford, wrote to the National Gallery acknowledging the soundness of Cursiter's objections to the use of the PG, and therefore admitting the need for two new buildings, one for the NMAS and another for the Gallery of Modern Art. He continued, however:

In present circumstances the Commission can only express hope that patriotic citizens may come forward and assist in the provision of the needed buildings.... The need for a Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh is doubtless not less than the need which was met in the case of London by Sir Henry Tate in 1893.³⁴

³² 'Art and Culture in Edinburgh', *Scotsman*, 21 January 1930.

³³ 'Observations on Recommendations made by the Royal Commission on Museums and Galleries', letter dated 19 March 1931. NG5/6/1.

³⁴ Letter dated 1 June 1933. NG5/6/1.

Appealing for philanthropic gestures was typical of much arts funding at that time. Edinburgh had the example of the SNPG, which had been funded by John Ritchie Findlay, proprietor of *The Scotsman* newspaper. Although there was no immediate hope of public finance for a building to house a new institution, it should be noted that from this time onwards, there was never any further question about the desirability of a Gallery of Modern Art for Scotland. Notwithstanding the public enthusiasm for the project, however, nothing could be achieved without a suitable building. Cursiter recognised the need to identify a possible site for the proposed new institution: this would provide a clear focus for any negotiations. He identified York Buildings, on Queen Street directly opposite the SNPG, as the most suitable option. This was at the time occupied by the Department of Agriculture, but they expected to vacate these premises when the new Scottish Office building was completed. Cursiter urged the Board to put in a claim for this building should it become vacant, which they did in October 1933. Thereafter, for the next 45 years, it would remain the default option for the proposed GMA in Edinburgh.

William Ormsby-Gore was appointed Commissioner of Works in 1934, and on arrival in Edinburgh, he made clear his approval of the concept of a GMA for Edinburgh. He reiterated, however, the need to find private financial backing, and confided to Cursiter that a donor, who wished to remain anonymous, had in fact come forward and offered to pay for a building.³⁵ The benefactor turned out to be Alexander Grant, already renowned for his philanthropy in donating a total of £200,000 to the construction of the National Library in Edinburgh. His condition was that a site should be available immediately to allow work to commence.³⁶ This caused complications for the York Buildings site, as the new offices in St Andrew's House were not expected to be ready until 1938, four years hence. Cursiter suggested the government offices might move into alternative short-term accommodation to allow building on the gallery to commence immediately, but the suggestion met with no approval. He therefore set about looking for another possible venue that could be used without delay. In a letter to the Commissioner, he reports driving around the city one weekend looking at any possible site, ranging from Duddingston to Inverleith,

³⁵ The donor had contacted John Buchan, the thriller writer who was also M.P. for the Scottish Universities, to make this offer, and Buchan had passed the information on to Ormsby-Gore. GMA A33/1.

³⁶ This was presumably as a consequence of the procrastination over agreeing a site for the National Library, a problem that was still unresolved at this time.

and commenting on the feasibility of each.³⁷ The letter restated the generally-held opinion that sites in Edinburgh are hard to find. Various options were investigated in more depth, including Bruntsfield House, on the south of the Meadows. Cursiter felt this was rather too distant from the city centre, and he also noted that its situation, set at an awkward angle to the main thoroughfare, would prevent a gallery from creating any direct impact on the city fabric, and therefore from asserting its presence. For that reason he was reluctant to consider it for a GMA. Cursiter was aware of the value of urban positioning for important public institutions; the difficulties encountered at the current location on Belford Road confirm the validity of Cursiter's objection.

In the meantime, however, it became known that the Royal High School, still in its original Thomas Hamilton building at the foot of Calton Hill, was eager to move into premises better suited to the needs of modern education. This had already been suggested as a venue for the NGS during the debates in the early years of the century and Cursiter saw great potential in the site, as part of a general scheme to develop the Calton Hill area, alongside the new government offices that were planned at St Andrew's House. He therefore suggested that the Royal High should be encouraged to take the Bruntsfield site, since all the factors acting against its use as a gallery would become advantages for a school.³⁸ Negotiations continued for some time, but Cursiter felt that he was not receiving adequate support or commitment from the government departments involved in negotiations. At one stage, he wrote rather sharply to Ormsby-Gore, warning him that he risked being the only Commissioner of Works who had 'lost a Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art!'³⁹ Sadly this proved prophetic, because Grant eventually withdrew his offer.⁴⁰ The lack of dedicated political support for proposals to promote the institution is a recurrent theme in the history of the GMA.

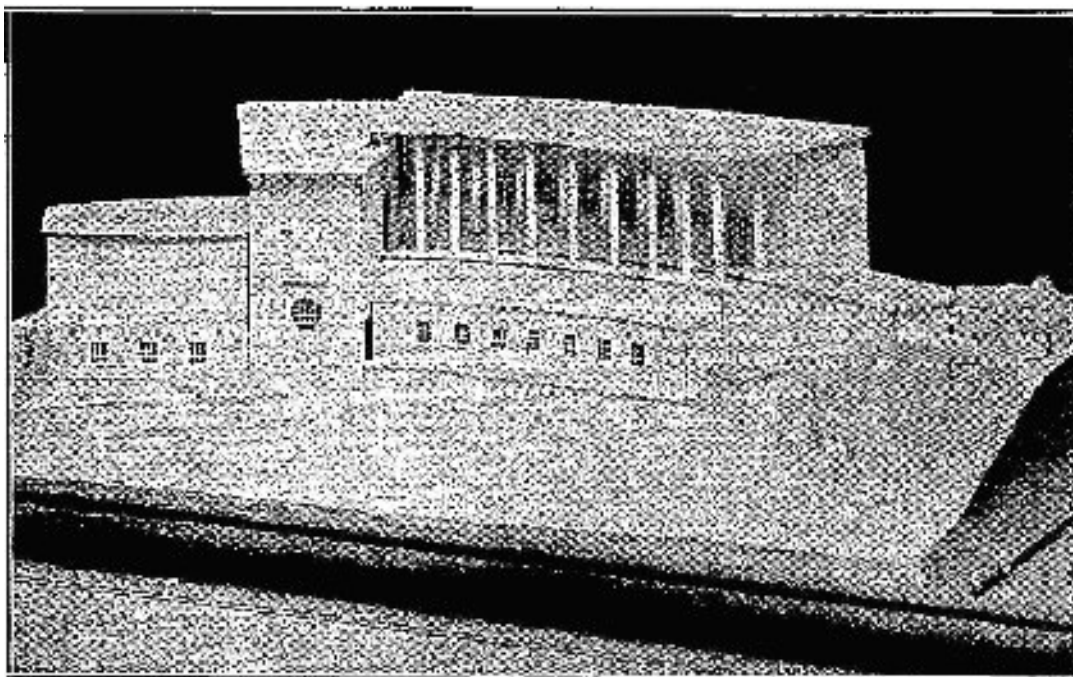
³⁷ For example, he looked at the site on the North West corner of the Botanics, and noted as a point in its favour that 'it was on a direct tram route to the Portrait Gallery'. GMA A33/1: Box labelled Cursiter Research. (Appendix A)

³⁸ It eventually became part of Gillespie's School, and remains in use to the present.

³⁹ Letter dated 3 December 1935. GMA A33/1: Box labelled Cursiter Research.

⁴⁰ This may have been due to reports of the possibility of using the Royal High building being leaked to the public by Sir Arthur Kay at the 1935 SMAA annual meeting, when he alluded to 'the need for a major benefactor: He had not used the words a "Tate Gallery" for Scotland. He preferred meantime to call it a "Luxembourg." The name of Tate would live in England for ever. Let another name live in Scotland for ever! Surely an immortality which winged its way from the glory of Edinburgh was something which generous and public-spirited Scotsmen would covet.' (*Scotsman*, 5 June 1935, 'Hall of Modern Art'.) Grant died in 1937.

Despite this major disappointment, Cursiter carried on doing everything in his power to further the establishment of a new gallery. Public discussions continued and in 1937, local architect William Kininmonth submitted a model of a proposed gallery to the Society of Scottish Artists (SSA) annual exhibition, where it was well received.



A model by W. Hardie Kininmonth, A.R.I.B.A., of a suggested modern art gallery for Edinburgh which would include an experimental film theatre (left.)

Figure 1: Photograph of William Kininmonth's model as printed in *The Scotsman*, 11 December 1937

A review of the exhibition states:

The need for such a gallery, which has long been admitted, was restated yesterday by the President; and his plea should be the more effective for being illustrated by so practical and admirable an exhibit. In such a gallery, exhibitions, not only of painting and sculpture, but of the modern industrial arts and crafts, could be more advantageously shown than in any existing building. It may be that Mr Kininmonth's model, which is certain of interested and sympathetic attention, presents the shape of things to come.⁴¹

The inclusion of a cinema in the model denotes a keen awareness of international developments in modern art museums. The combination of fine art and industrial art indicates a totally different concept of an art gallery from the National Gallery's display of its historical collection. The idea of combining art and industry demonstrates an engagement with continental developments, particularly the Bauhaus

⁴¹ 'Society of Scottish Artists: an Exhibition of Interest and Merit', *Scotsman*, 11 December 1937.

school. Guest lectures at Edinburgh College of Art from Walter Gropius and Erich Mendelssohn in the early 1930s had been well received, and were influential in the formation of the Scottish Committee of the Council for Art and Industry.⁴² Stanley Cursiter was a leading member of this group, formed in 1934, which aimed to bring art and industry together to improve industrial design. Herbert Read had been Professor of Fine Art at Edinburgh University in 1932, and he too had contributed to the notion of modern art as a means of improving standards of industrial design.⁴³ The combination of fine art and industrial art had been central to the strategy of MoMA from its foundation, and this model exerted a strong influence on all subsequent GMAs.

A Bauhaus vision for Scotland

Cursiter carried on campaigning, and in 1941 published a pamphlet with the text of a speech he had delivered, entitled ‘The Place of the Art Gallery in the Life of the Community’, reworked from a lecture of the same name he had given in 1937. The text opens with an echo of the 1909 Futurist Manifesto in which Marinetti equated museums and cemeteries: ‘There is a general inclination to regard the typical Art Gallery as a sort of graveyard for pictures where the visitor tiptoes about so as not to waken the attendants’.⁴⁴ Cursiter had been one of several Scottish artists to be briefly influenced by the exhibition of Futurist works shown at the SSA show in 1913, producing such works as *Sensation of Crossing the Street* in that year. Unlike Marinetti, however, who demanded the destruction of museums, he wanted to transform them into familiar, living spaces, not rarefied mausoleums: ‘If we had a Gallery for Modern Art [...] what should it be? I want a Gallery in which pictures will be shown in a contemporary setting, on an almost domestic scale’.⁴⁵ He acknowledged that a Gallery dedicated to modern art would have different requirements, and should not simply form an extension to the existing National

⁴² Unpublished article by Brian Edwards.

⁴³ His important work, *Art and Industry. The Principles of Industrial Design* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934) was published shortly after his departure from Edinburgh.

⁴⁴ Stanley Cursiter, *The Place of the Art Gallery in the Life of the Community*, in NLS Acc 5451/16. Marinetti’s more dramatic description stated: ‘Museums, cemeteries! Truly identical in their sinister juxtaposition of bodies that do not know each other... To make a visit once a year, as one goes to see the graves of our dead once a year, that we could allow.’ Point 10 of the first Manifesto states: ‘We want to demolish museums...’

⁴⁵ ‘The Gallery would have much more than pictures – furniture, carpets, curtains, fabrics of all kinds, ceramics and pottery, the crafts, and even the mass-produced articles of industry if these have their appropriate place in the setting.’ Cursiter, *The Place of the Art Gallery*.

Gallery. His reference to ‘domestic scale’ was in keeping with latest trends in display, deriving in particular from German museums, which from the end of the nineteenth century had introduced less grandiose settings for their displays of contemporary art.⁴⁶ These had been extremely influential on Barr when he conceived of the interiors for MoMA, which were intended to maintain a domestic scale.

To accompany his text, Cursiter commissioned the young local architect, Alan Reiach, to prepare plans for his imagined gallery, and he himself created a model to illustrate more clearly the planned structure.

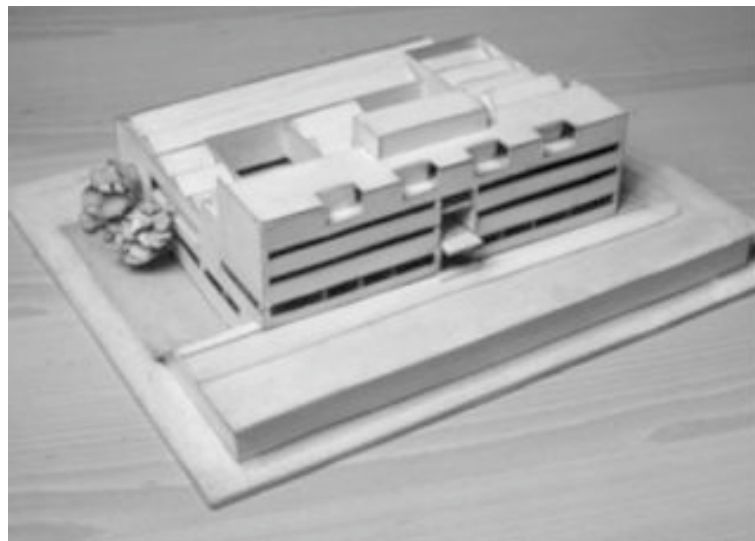


Figure 2: Model for proposed Gallery of Modern Art on Queen Street

It is interesting to compare this model with Kininmonth’s of only a few years earlier. Kininmonth was forward-looking in the elements he incorporated, but the design uses a very traditional gallery vocabulary of grand colonnades and elegant stone. This is in stark contrast to Reiach’s complete engagement with the Modernist style. Reiach had studied at Edinburgh College of Art under Herbert Wellington, alongside Basil Spence, who also became an important Modernist architect. Since Cursiter commissioned the plans, we must suppose that they encapsulated his vision for the gallery:

The Gallery has been designed to provide the greatest possible area of roof-lit gallery space combined with ample reserve galleries and storage. Also, to achieve the maximum flexibility, the shape and size of rooms can be altered at will by sliding or revolving walls, so that rooms can be adapted for various types of exhibitions, and sections can be closed or opened without interfering with the main circulation. On the top floor the view over the Forth has been considered as one of the assets offered by the site, and on this floor it is proposed that the galleries should make the closest approach to normal domestic scale and the

⁴⁶ See Klonk, Chaps. 2 and 3.

opportunity secured of showing contemporary art in virtually a domestic setting.⁴⁷

The design offered features that still today are considered commendable within museum architecture, including flexible divisions of space to allow for different types of exhibitions, and main galleries with more specialist collections of reserve material adjacent. Unlike so many galleries that were becoming increasingly isolated from the world around them, Cursiter's exploited the relationship with the outside world as a positive feature, particularly for the spectacular view of the natural landscape that the site provided. This was not to be a gallery where one retreated from the outside world, but one where the outside world enhanced the interior space.

Reiach himself wrote of these plans –

The site is an important one and well suited to the needs of a public building of this kind. It is centrally placed, being within three minutes walk of the Post Office. ... it would be seen from a considerable distance away.

He evidently concurred with Cursiter's earlier objection to Bruntsfield House's position, and highlighted the need for a public institution to be readily visible and identifiable. In addition to this, however, the type of experience offered by the proposed gallery on Queen St was intended to be pleasant:

The site is open on the west to Queen St Gardens and it has been thought desirable to link the building with the gardens on the lower ground floor level, pleasant views of the lawns and trees being obtained from large windows on the west wing....⁴⁸

Again this highlights the interaction with the outside world, and the benefits of allowing the visitor to see the attractive views around. On the top floor, too, the special properties afforded by the location were exploited:

The third and top floor has been planned freely as a setting for modern textiles, furniture, pictures and sculpture displayed in a domestic setting. It is proposed to plan a series of flats, subdivided as occasion demands to produce rooms of varying sizes. In order to reproduce normal living conditions the scale on this floor is altogether more intimate than in the main public galleries. Advantage has been taken of the view over the Forth, and terraces open out from the flats to the North, while on the South, small sun gardens, screened from the road below have been planned to open off each unit. A small restaurant might be also placed on this floor either as an alternative to one on the lower ground level, facing Queen Street gardens or in addition to it.

⁴⁷ NG5/6/11/16.

⁴⁸ Alan Reiach, 'Museum of Modern Art plans'. Reiach included detailed costings for the project, comprising two alternative versions. The first, smaller version, occupying only the York Buildings plot, was priced at £120,750; the second, which would have included the first three houses at the top of Dublin St (to be purchased and demolished), at £189,000. NG5/6/11/1-14. (Appendix B)

The inclusion of textiles and furniture again indicated awareness of European and American developments within the field of museum collections and displays, and further strengthened the connection between art and industry. This structure proposed by Reiach and Cursiter did not claim heritage from the grand palaces dedicated to art, but from a more intimate domestic space. The variety of spaces for the art on display, with larger galleries on the ground and first floor, specialist study galleries on the second floor, and domestic galleries on the third, recognised the need to show all art in a setting appropriate to its form.

What is striking about this proposal is how welcoming the experience was to be made. If the architectural frame embodies the intentions of the institution, this building would have signalled a Gallery that engaged with its surroundings, and that sought to make all visitors welcome and comfortable: it was not a detached, inward-looking vision, but an extroverted and accommodating one. Views were incorporated across the Forth or across Queen St Gardens, opportunities to eat were provided in various places, and care was taken to avoid visitor fatigue. The gallery was to provide the visitor not just with the spiritual uplift of the art on display, but also a pleasant, sociable experience. The provision of different types of space is also interesting – as we shall see in the next section when examining Douglas Hall's ideas, the need for differentiated viewing spaces remained an important consideration. The contrasting atmosphere to the traditional space of the National Gallery would have established the Gallery of Modern Art as a quite separate institution. It was not envisaged as a continuation of the NGS up to the present, but as a strikingly different concept – less of a rarefied 'temple for the arts' and more a vibrant community-used space.⁴⁹

Although Cursiter's ideal for a GMA was quite distinct from the conditions at the National Gallery, he used the particular circumstances of the war to further the cause of modern art inside the more formal space. Once the permanent collection was removed for safe-keeping to various country houses throughout Scotland, leaving the gallery completely empty, Cursiter took the opportunity to put into practice some of the ideas he had formulated, and staged numerous temporary exhibitions of

⁴⁹ 'Plans for Institution of a New Type in Edinburgh', *Scotsman*, 14 September 1943: 'They contemplated attracting the interest of the general public... They hoped also that it would be a sort of meeting ground for art institutions in Scotland and a centre for a great many scattered interests.'

contemporary art, design, craft and architecture.⁵⁰ Many of these were accompanied by explanatory lectures, which were very well received. Gallery attendance rose fourfold over the course of the war, thereby making the gallery a more familiar space to many people, and Cursiter was determined to build on this in the post-war period. A letter in *The Scotsman* agreed: 'For the first time in its history, the National Gallery of Scotland has become a focal point of living artistic culture [...] the fear has been abroad that the Gallery may be obliged to revert to its former Olympian quietude.'⁵¹

The difficulties in the immediate post-war period, however, centred not only on finance, but also on the availability of building materials, as priority was given to the reconstruction of war-damaged towns. For this reason, the suggestion was made that some of the large unoccupied New Town houses might provide an interim solution. Properties in Ainslie Place were acquired for the Prints department, but nothing was ever deemed suitable for the modern art project. This type of solution, however, was regularly proposed. As late as April 1948, a *Scotsman* report covered Cursiter's approval of the purchase of a flat in Atholl Crescent by the Scottish Women's Lyceum Club to use as a gallery.⁵² Although the endeavour brings to mind the founding mothers of New York's Modern Art Gallery, this venture seems to have had little success.

Rather abruptly, less than a month after this apparent sign of possible progress, Cursiter announced that he had decided to retire. In his autobiography, *Looking Back*, he referred briefly to the plans he had for the Art Centre, but acknowledged the difficulties imposed by the reconstruction process: 'With the end of the war, however, we realised that all schemes we had devised had no part in the post-war economy. We doubted if anything would be done for at least twenty years. I had had enough!'⁵³

⁵⁰ Several catalogues have survived, and are preserved in the SNGMA archives.

⁵¹ 'Scotland's National Gallery: Development of War-Time Activities', *Scotsman*, 29 November 1944. There were similar debates about the National Gallery in London; see Suzanne Bosman, *The National Gallery in Wartime* (London: National Gallery Co. Ltd., 2008).

⁵² 'New Edinburgh Gallery', *Scotsman*, 23 April 1948: "Mr Stanley Cursiter hopes to see part of his dreams fulfilled as the result of the enterprise of the Scottish Women's Lyceum Club, who recently acquired No. 11 Atholl Crescent, Edinburgh, for the purpose of establishing a small art gallery and concert hall in the drawingroom flat. Mr Cursiter ... told a colleague that he found the proposed gallery admirable. It will bring music and art into a domestic setting. Mr Cursiter favours such a movement away from big galleries."

⁵³ Stanley Cursiter, *Looking Back: a book of reminiscences*, (published privately: printed by Econoprint, Edinburgh, 1974), p. 28.

It is understandable why he eventually became weary of the lack of support from the relevant authorities, but his contribution to promoting the cause of a GMA should not be underestimated. In the twenty-year period of his Directorship, this cause had acquired far greater momentum and been given visible shape thanks to his model for the Queen Street site. He had convinced politicians of the need for such an institution, and he had engaged the local public in his vision for it. He had introduced the public to a variety of new art forms, and worked to make art accessible to all by breaking down the formality of the gallery space. Unfortunately several more years would pass before his vision was realised, during which time much of that public enthusiasm was lost.

Festival of Britain proposals – city centre sites

Ellis Waterhouse was appointed to succeed Cursiter. He was the first Director whose background was as an academic art-historian rather than a trained and practising artist. As such, he was responsible for a shift in perspective away from the predominantly spiritual approach to the museum preferred by Cursiter, in which the main purpose of the display was to offer the visitor an enriching experience, to a more obvious art-historical one, where the displays were arranged in order to illustrate the evolution of Western art. Waterhouse was less urgently committed to the cause of the GMA than Cursiter, being more interested in building up the historical collection at the National Gallery. Nevertheless, during his Directorship another wave of proposals for a GMA was produced. These arose during the discussions about how Edinburgh might participate in the Festival of Britain, to be held in 1951.

The Festival was organised to raise people's spirits after the devastation and hardship endured during the war, and was meant to showcase British art and industry. As well as the central events in London, many other activities were scheduled throughout the country. Glasgow planned to hold an exhibition on Industrial Power at Kelvin Hall, and within Edinburgh it was heralded as an opportunity at a time of more general austerity to further the cause of a GMA. William O. Hutchison, former principal of Glasgow School of Art, referred to the coming Festival as 'a heaven-sent opportunity for Edinburgh to obtain at least a temporary gallery of modern art'. He went on to assert that 'a National Gallery of Modern Art for Scotland was not only a desirable

thing for the future, but an absolute necessity now'.⁵⁴ There was still a strong emphasis on the benefit of a GMA to standards of industrial design, so the continuing hesitancy about establishing such an institution was presented as hindering Scotland's design skills.

In response to these ideas, Reiach, whose plans for the Queen Street site were still held as the ultimate goal, submitted several new proposals, covering both temporary and permanent structures. He suggested erecting temporary structures on Calton Hill, using the ground behind the unfinished National Monument, or in Princes St Gardens, below the Scott monument. Alternatively, he proposed plans for a permanent structure either below Ramsay Gardens, built into the hillside, or in Princes St Gardens, below the RSA building. All of the plans retained the crisp modernist aesthetic already proposed for the Queen Street site.⁵⁵ They were all in central locations; there was no question that a gallery of modern art would be located anywhere except in the city centre. They also show that there were possible sites, despite the general consensus that Edinburgh had few 'ideal sites', although planning regulations and public opinion could always provide strong opposition. However, although they aroused much interest, the schemes made no lasting impact: Edinburgh's contribution to the Festival of Britain was an exhibition of architecture and crafts held in the Royal Scottish Museum on Chambers St. The proposals did keep the question of a GMA in the public eye, but by this time public enthusiasm had declined. The Picasso and Matisse exhibition, shown first in London and then in Glasgow, aroused much controversy: the newspaper reports included comments from visitors such as: 'I come to a picture gallery to derive pleasure, but I am afraid I got none here,' and 'These pictures have shocked me. I certainly would have none of them in my home, nor would I have inflicted them on others'.⁵⁶ The SMAA Chairman expressed similar views in the Annual Report of 1948: 'He would be a fool who would deny that the standards of art today, like the standards in other matters in this country, are at a low ebb'.⁵⁷ From this time onwards, the momentum for the GMA project had to be sustained by a select group of supporters. The cause of modern art was now championed mainly by an intellectual and artistic elite.

⁵⁴ 'Edinburgh's Need for National Gallery', *Scotsman*, 17 December 1948.

⁵⁵ See Appendix C.

⁵⁶ 'Picasso-Matisse Exhibition in Glasgow', *Scotsman*, 26 January 1946.

⁵⁷ 41st Annual Report of the SMAA, ED003/2/2.

Despite the lack of progress, the Standing Commission continued to recommend the project, and in March 1951 the Secretary of State for Scotland gave his official approval of the York Buildings site, although always with the same proviso:

... ultimately a Gallery of Modern Art, ..., should be built on the site of York Buildings in Queen Street; and ... a new Museum of Antiquities will be provided on a site still to be determined.

The Minister [of Works] and I wish to emphasise that, so far as these proposals involve new building, they must be related to the general economic situation and to the competing demands on our resources of labour and materials.⁵⁸

In fact the major impediment remained relocating the government offices from the York Buildings site, which meant that no progress was possible, and the stalemate continued.

Reiach's plans were given a brief second showing a few years later in 1956 as part of the response to the Abercrombie plan for traffic in the centre of Edinburgh, which proposed using Princes St Gardens as a parking facility. Reiach published a reworking of his earlier unrealised proposal for the gallery inside the gardens, as an underground extension to the Royal Scottish Academy, very similar to what eventually became the Weston link, but, once again, to no avail.⁵⁹

End of stalemate

The Standing Committee carried on meeting regularly, and produced its quinquennial report on the period 1954-58. This referred to the ongoing dilemma posed by the Ministry of Works' lack of progress in finding alternative accommodation for the Civil Service departments still based in Queen Street, and listed possible alternatives:

The unwillingness to contemplate the building of the promised gallery has been underlined by offers of temporary accommodation in which some of the work of a Gallery of Modern Art could be started on a small scale. The first offer, of the first floor of a warehouse over a garage in an unsavoury part of the city, was refused for its complete unsuitability. The second suggestion, of the University Club on Princes St, would have suited, but the Treasury would not sanction the purchase. The third suggestion, of Inverleith House, a small mansion in the

⁵⁸ http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1951/mar/09/scotland-museums-and-galleries

⁵⁹ See Appendix D. These proposals are discussed in Craig Richardson, *Scottish Art since 1960* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). Richardson refers to Reiach's plans for 'a part-sunken gallery alongside the RSA building. The vistas of Edinburgh Castle would become part of the visitor experience, seen through the glass walls of Reiach's inspiring designs.' (p. 35) In fact, Richardson has mistaken the orientation of the proposed scheme, which was in East Princes St gardens, and would not therefore have had any view to the castle.

middle of the Botanics, had only just been received, and was under consideration.⁶⁰

Changing attitudes to what constitutes a suitable site are apparent here. In 1958, the notion of locating a gallery of modern art in a warehouse in an unsavoury part of the city was rejected as wholly unsuitable, whereas only a few years later such sites were being actively sought. The report contains the first mention of Inverleith House, which in fact proved to be the first acceptable compromise that would finally resolve the stalemate. There was an element of serendipity to this solution. Inverleith House had long served as the official residence of the Regius Keeper of the Botanics, but when Harold R. Fletcher was appointed in 1956, he did not wish to take it up as his residence. Fletcher was an avid collector of modern art and was keen to promote the cause of a Scottish GMA. He suggested that Inverleith House might be used as a temporary home for such a gallery, and the Standing Committee viewed the suggestion favourably when they came to Edinburgh in July 1958. They visited Inverleith House, and agreed that it would provide a suitable temporary solution until the long-awaited Queen Street site was finally vacated. The advantages of opening in a smaller venue had become increasingly apparent to the Standing Committee.⁶¹ The feeling was shared by David Baxandall. He had replaced Ellis Waterhouse in 1952 as Director of the NGS, and had taken a more active role in promoting the cause of the GMA. Both he and the Trustees had become concerned at the risk of insisting on the large complex at Queen St and then facing ridicule on opening such a gallery without enough works to fill the space. This was surely a justifiable concern. Indeed, even the diminutive Inverleith House had to rely mainly on temporary exhibitions and loans in its earliest stages, because the permanent collection was so slight.

Negotiations now proceeded rapidly and once the decision was taken to accept Inverleith House as an interim solution, progress was remarkably swift. Within a year of the first visit by the Standing Committee, the National Gallery of Modern Art was officially founded under the National Galleries of Scotland Act of 1959, with the Director and Trustees of the other two National Galleries given authority to run it.

⁶⁰ NG5/6/6/5.

⁶¹ The Standing Committee report states: 'To begin in a small way in temporary premises, although it would not provide the space for large loan exhibitions which we so conspicuously lack, would at least allow us to begin collecting work by living artists, before their prices have risen to prohibitive heights.' NG5/6/6/5.

Finally, half a century after the first steps had been taken by the SMAA, Edinburgh was to have a National Gallery dedicated to Modern Art.



Figure 3: Inverleith House

CHAPTER 2

Inverleith House

Preamble – opening speech

As preparations progressed for the opening, David Baxandall and the Trustees began planning the inauguration ceremony. Initially, the Queen Mother had been invited to perform this duty, but although she was happy to take part, she could not attend until October. The Trustees felt it was essential to open during the Edinburgh International Festival in August to attract most attention from the press and public. This points to one of the ongoing difficulties for the gallery: Edinburgh receives intense national and international coverage for the weeks of the International Festival and Fringe, but for the rest of the year its artistic activities tend to go unreported. They chose Kenneth Clark, believing he would be capable of generating maximum media interest for the launch.¹ Clark was not yet the popular face of art history that he became following his successful television series, **Civilisation**, but he was a well-known and respected figure, having served as Director of the National Gallery in London and Chairman of the Arts Council. He executed the commission to open the Gallery with great diplomacy, acknowledging the difficulties facing the institution but encouraging optimism. He made much of the fact that this was the first national institution in the UK dedicated exclusively to modern art. He alluded to certain criticisms that had appeared in the press, rejecting their negative content: ‘too pretty, too agreeable, and that the present exhibition was too tasteful. What a revelation of the Puritanism with which the English still regard art.’²

The accusation of excessive ‘prettiness’ was not unfounded. The new gallery was situated at the heart of one of the city’s most beautiful and popular tourist attractions, the Royal Botanic Gardens. This was obviously a point in its favour as many people

¹ Baxandall wrote to him explaining the difficulties the gallery would face: ‘We shall have to depend very greatly on loans and gifts, and because of this we feel that it is important to arouse as much public and press attention as possible in the official opening ... My Trustees are convinced, and so am I, that nobody would be more capable of doing this than yourself.’ Letter to Clark, 25 April, 1960. GMA A33/1.

² Typescript of Clark’s opening speech, GMA A33/1.

visited the gardens, despite not being the hoped-for city centre location. It occupied a small Georgian mansion built for the Rocheid family in 1774, which provided several small but well-proportioned rooms over three storeys, the upper two of which were to be used mainly for temporary exhibitions. Ironically, it was just the scale of domestic accommodation that Cursiter might have wanted, but this was now less suited to contemporary art forms. Over the next few years this came to present a major challenge for the institution. Although a GMA existed, it could not adequately perform the task of illustrating the major trends of recent art, because the architectural frame did not allow it.

The setting was indeed very ‘agreeable’ at a time when much modern art was deliberately not so, and this immediately introduced an uncomfortable tension between the outward appearance of the Gallery and what it contained. This tension has persisted up to the present. The institution has always retained a certain outward ‘gentility’ that is often at odds with the works it is showing, depriving the more challenging works of some of their power to disturb. The ‘gentility’ was perhaps compounded further by the predominantly middle-class character of the city itself, and of the particular area at Inverleith: by opening within a space that was familiar to, and frequented by, the middle classes, it conveyed a message that this was its target audience. The ‘frame’ risked undermining any potentially controversial content; showing radical works in such a calm, well-ordered space may lessen the intended impact and shock, although it could equally be claimed that the contrast between exterior and interior can add to the drama.³ In *Inside the White Cube*, Brian O’Doherty confronted the question of the discrete impact of the ‘white cube’ aesthetic, revealing the subtle meaning conveyed by this apparently neutral aesthetic choice.⁴ As far as was possible in the restricted space, the Gallery was conforming to the model of the essential Modernist ‘temple’.

The criticism of the new Gallery as ‘too tasteful’ purely on the basis of the opening display was premature, as the institution had not yet had the opportunity to reveal its

³ One reporter noted the contrast as contributing positively to the experience of the art: ‘The interior has been remodelled to present an appearance of almost clinical austerity – though the scale of the rooms retains some intimacy – and the walls shine with a whiteness and brightness from contrast with which even the most abstract of abstractions derive a mysterious profundity of their own.’ *Guardian*, 10 August 1960.

⁴ Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1986), Chap. 1.

longer-term intentions or ambitions, but it highlights how closely the container and the content are connected. The building used to house art works has a powerful impact on those works; a building that is inherently 'genteel' risks imposing some of that gentility on the works it shows. There is more awareness today of the potential of older buildings to provide a richer, more layered experience than was the case in 1960. Then, a Modernist structure was still seen as the most appropriate for an institution representing modern art. By agreeing to open in a building that did not announce an architectural commitment to the modern, the institution began its existence from a position of compromise. It might have been possible to work against the constraints of the building, but that was not the attitude adopted. The choice was made to play to the inherent strengths of the building, which were its intimacy and its tranquillity. This choice affected both the works that were acquired for the nascent permanent collection and the displays that were mounted in the rooms.

In Clark's opening remarks he acknowledged that the Gallery would have to start building its collection more or less from scratch, but he tried to offer encouragement. Referring to the exorbitant prices currently fetched by 20th century art, he asserted:

If I were director of this gallery I should feel relieved that I could not compete in this field. In my experience it is always more fun to be director of a poor gallery than a rich one.
The pleasure of a limited budget is that what you lack in money you make up in courage and clairvoyance.⁵

With a purchase grant of £7,500 allocated to it, the Gallery was indeed poor, but Clark's suggestion, that this would save the new institution from competing in an inflated market, offered slight consolation.⁶ The opening of the new Gallery was widely covered in the press, with even the most favourable reports commenting on the paucity of works in the collection. The *Burlington Magazine* wrote: 'as the nucleus of the new National Gallery, it cannot help being a little disappointing'.⁷ The *Times* described the collection as 'of less interest than most temporary exhibitions', and expressed disappointment that the first Gallery 'devoted solely to the art of this century, can only be described as having made the most faint-hearted of beginning'.⁸

⁵ Typescript of Clark's speech. GMA A33/1.

⁶ During the House of Lords debate on the National Galleries of Scotland Bill on 16 July 1959, Lord Forbes clarified that the sum of £7,500 'is purely for the purchase of new paintings and sculpture. I understand that the new purchases will be purely purchases of paintings done during this century. They need not necessarily be by Scottish painters but can be by other painters.' (Hansard, 16 July 1959)

⁷ *Burlington Magazine*, No. 691, Vol. CII, October 1960, p. 421.

⁸ 'Modest Start to New Scottish Gallery', *The Times*, 10 August 1960.

The title chosen by the Trustees set a standard of expectation that the institution failed to reach in its opening show.⁹ Baxandall had feared this reaction when considering a large new building in the city centre, but even in Inverleith House, the shortcomings could not be disguised. Baxandall himself acknowledged the difficulty, stating that the growth of the collection would be slow, but emphasised that ‘at least it has begun’.¹⁰

Acquisitions Policy – First Discussions

Referring back to the introductory quotation from Richard Dormont, the question of what could be achieved on a restricted budget was first addressed in the discussions about forming a collection of works of art from scratch. As soon as a firm agreement had been reached about Inverleith House and work had begun on the conversion, the question of what to display there became urgent, given the small number of modern works already held by the NGS. In common with many national galleries, the NGS had always operated a policy of not acquiring works by any artist until at least ten years after the artist’s death. This fairly standard practice amongst important public galleries was intended to prevent living artists gaining unfair commercial advantage from being included in a major institution’s collection, or inflating interest in an artist shortly after his/her death. The NGS had adhered to this policy with very few exceptions. The only work by a living artist was Oscar Kokoschka’s **Zrani** (GMA 21); this had been gifted to the NGS by the Czechoslovakian government in 1942 in recognition of the support received during the war.



Figure 4: Oscar Kokoschka, *Zrani*

⁹ The Gallery was initially called ‘The National Gallery of Modern Art’. At the Board of Trustees meeting on 25 October 1960, Lord Crawford, the Chairman, ‘questioned the appropriateness of the title and the Board approved the revised title “Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art”.’ Board Room Minutes, October 1960.

¹⁰ *Scots Magazine*, October 1960.

By the end of the 1920s, following the Royal Commission's report supporting the notion of a separate GMA, there was little incentive for the NGS to purchase recent art, as it would instead become the responsibility of the new gallery whenever it was formed. The delay in opening the new institution had therefore had a major impact on the development of the collection, since by the time the gallery finally opened, almost sixty years of immensely varied artistic developments had elapsed, none of which was represented in the SNGMA.

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill remarks that 'meaning in museums is constructed in relation to the collections which the museum holds'.¹¹ Clearly at the start, the SNGMA could not construct any standard version of the 'meaning' of twentieth century art. The only 'meaning' that the collection could express was one of the randomness of collecting. The work carried out so assiduously by the SMAA since their foundation in 1907 had always been intended to form the cornerstone of an eventual national collection. They had always operated with professionalism in conducting the business of acquiring works either through purchases or bequests, but the members who had taken up positions of authority within the organisation had not engaged with any of the trends of modern art. They had become progressively more interested in focusing the collection almost exclusively on Scottish artists working in a mainly traditional, figurative style. If their collection had been used as the basis for the new institution, the meaning would have been a narrow one: it would have had a specific identity, not a representative one.¹²

A public collection cannot be formed simply according to the taste and interests of an individual. All decisions involve some degree of corporate responsibility. As Simon Knell says: 'Collecting policies are *the* gatekeeper documents of the collection, though there may be acquisitions committees which interpret these documents and thereby hold the keys to that gate'.¹³ In the case of the SNGMA, the key holders were

¹¹ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), p 3.

¹² The SMAA offered their collection to the SNGMA in 1963, when the Association was being disbanded, expressing a desire to keep the collection intact. The new Gallery decided that so large a collection of Scottish works would have overwhelmed the emerging institution, giving it an overly Scottish identity. The Board of Trustees therefore made a request for a single work, *A Bloomsbury Family* by William Orpen. The request was granted, and the work is the sole example from the SMAA in the SNGMA's collection.

¹³ Simon Knell, *Museums and the Future of Collecting* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), p. 13.

the Board of Trustees, who sanctioned or rejected the acquisition of works proposed by the Director. Under the conditions of the 1959 National Galleries of Scotland Act, the SNGMA was to be run by the Board of Trustees of the NGS. There were several Trustees at the time who were keen collectors or connoisseurs of modern art, in particular Alexander Maitland, Lord Crawford and David Talbot Rice. Their presence ensured that the interests of modern art were well served. They requested that the Director propose a strategy for the acquisition of works for the new collection; this took the form of a memorandum, which was discussed at the Board of Trustees meeting in June 1959. Baxandall laid out two alternative courses. The first was for a long term strategy that involved setting aside the greater part of the purchase funds that were assigned to the new Gallery to purchase few works, but of the highest quality; in other words, to replicate the strategy that was then in place at the NGS, where there were still many gaps in the collection of historical art that were slowly being filled by judicious purchases.¹⁴ The second strategy involved using the entire fund for the two years prior to opening (1959 and 1960) 'to provide the best possible display for opening'.¹⁵ Baxandall argued strongly in favour of the first option, even though it would cause problems initially, and the Trustees accepted this unanimously.

What factors determined their decisions? Knell has examined how collections are formed:

The collecting problem facing museums has many facets. Many believe it is simply a matter of locating an answer to the questions 'What and how should a museum collect?' But the problem is also one of aspirations and implications: unsatisfied desires mingle with full stores and overcommitted budgets.¹⁶

The apparently simple question of what to collect turned out to be immensely complex. The restricted remit to cover art of the twentieth century might seem straightforward, but it quickly became evident that there were several conflicting options that had to be weighed against each other. The main dichotomies were between Scottish and international art, and between historic modern art and contemporary. The tension between these options has persisted throughout the entire history of the institution and has perhaps acted as a positive force, ensuring greater reflection on the purpose of every acquisition. The responsibility to bring 'the world

¹⁴ 'Memorandum on the Proposed Scope of the Collection', considered by the Board of Trustees, June 1959. Baxandall expressed his preference to 'concentrate mainly on the purchase of a few outstanding works, rather than many by less famous artists, and to set aside the major part of the purchase grant for the purchase of such masterpieces.' GMA A33/1/3/3/1.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Knell, p. 1.

to Scotland, Scotland to the world' expresses the sense of purpose felt by all Scotland's national institutions, a double-sided responsibility that requires delicate balancing.¹⁷ In the case of the SNGMA, the purpose might be further expressed as seeking to place Scottish art within a wider international context, thereby justifying acquisitions of local and international works of the entire period of the twentieth century. If too much emphasis is devoted to the work of Scottish artists, the Gallery risks seeming parochial, whereas if not enough attention is paid to Scottish artists, the Gallery can be accused of not promoting the art of its own people.

The second part of Knell's question – how should a museum collect? – presents as many difficulties. A gallery devoted to art must decide whether to collect several works by a few artists, or one work by as many artists as possible. Should it seek to excel in one area of the collection, or should it aspire to cover the period comprehensively? It faces the choice between acquiring 'atypical' works by artists who are best known for one particular style, and therefore misrepresenting that artist, or insisting on a 'typical' work, which may have less artistic merit, but represent a fair example of the artist's overall oeuvre. All of these choices have arisen over the years at the SNGMA, and the solutions adopted reveal the institution's shifting programme. They illustrate how the notion of the frame is not static within an institution, but is constantly updated according to circumstances.

As already noted, Inverleith House's diminutive size was initially considered an asset, given the dearth of appropriate works then held in the collection. Baxandall had written to Lord Haddington, defending the proposed venue:

The most serious fear expressed was that by accepting Inverleith House for a temporary NGS of Modern Art, Scotland was allowing itself to be fobbed off with a cheap substitute for the long promised new building on the site of York Buildings.

One sees the force of this point, but against it one has to remember that so far as modern foreign and English art (and modern Scottish work by artists still living) are concerned, the Trustees will have to build up the collection from nothing. The use of Inverleith House will allow them to begin to do that. Unless we have something for a collection, a large new building in Queen St might prove an embarrassment.¹⁸

The relatively small size of the temporary venue was a means of disguising the inadequate collection, but at the same time it added to the difficulty of proceeding to

¹⁷ The phrase featured in a publicity campaign for the National Museum of Scotland, but is equally relevant to the other national museums and galleries.

¹⁸ Letter from Baxandall to Lord Haddington, 11 July 1959. GMA A33/1/3/3/1.

build that collection. In the early discussions about purchasing policy, the need to bear in mind the future location of the institution was an important consideration.¹⁹

The principal mission of the acquisitions policy in the early years was to find a few, high quality works by the artists then considered most representative of the twentieth century. In this, Baxandall was proposing the path adopted by most museums of modern art, following the example set by Barr at MoMA. As Carol Duncan explained in *Civilizing Rituals*:

... the history of modern art as told in the MoMA would come to stand for the definitive story of “mainstream modernism.” As the core narrative of the western world’s premier collection of modern art for over half a century, it constituted the most authoritative history of modern art for generations of professional as well as non-professional people. To this day, modern museums ... continue to retell its central gospel, as do almost all history of art textbooks.²⁰

The gospel according to MoMA is told principally through the works of certain master-artists who are accorded higher status for their contribution to the evolution of art. An earlier article by Duncan and Allan Wallach had noted that at MoMA, Cézanne is the first artist in the story of modern art.²¹ This was indeed the point at which the NGS intended to start their modern collection: a work by Cézanne had been among the works donated by Alexander Maitland in 1960, and it was predicted that this would provide a fitting starting point for the new collection, but not until more suitable premises were found:

In the larger gallery in Queen Street it will almost certainly be thought best to take an earlier starting point for our survey of modern painting and sculpture (Cézanne and the reaction against impressionism is one obvious possibility) but in the small amount of space at Inverleith House the attempt to cover a shorter period would give a less inadequate result. Also, it does not seem appropriate to show paintings of quite such importance as those of Cézanne, Gauguin or Van Gogh in a gallery quite so far off the beaten track as Inverleith House.²²

Evidently the feeling prior to opening was that the location was a severe drawback.

¹⁹ ‘The Board thought it desirable that their present purchasing policy for Inverleith House should be guided by a general assumption about the functions of the Queen St Gallery: the assumption being that the Gallery should collect and display modern pictures, sculptures, prints and drawings, both British and Foreign.’ Board Room Minutes, June 1959.

²⁰ Duncan, p. 103.

²¹ ‘Thus, according to MOMA, the history of modern art begins with Cézanne, who confronts you at the entrance to the permanent collection. The arrangement makes his meaning obvious. He foreshadows Picasso and Cubism – that is, the decisive breakdown of tangible form. From Picasso and Cubism issue almost everything else.’ Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, ‘The Museum of Modern Art As Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis’, in *Marxist Perspectives*, 4, 1978, pp. 35-6.

²² ‘Memorandum on the proposed scope of the Collection’. GMA A33/1/3/3/1.

The notion of acquiring only masterpieces raises an interesting question about the Gallery's essential purpose. If it is principally educational, illustrating the developments taking place within the artistic field over the course of the century, it could be argued that even minor artists who adopted the significant innovations could demonstrate the evolution of styles. Baxandall, however, argued against this:

The development of painting in this period could be illustrated relatively quickly and inexpensively by collecting only the work of minor figures. This would almost certainly be a mistake. Marcoussis and Hayden, for example, charming painters though they can be, would be poor substitutes for Picasso and Braque as representatives of cubism. The major figures must be represented by typical works, and the greater part of the Modern Gallery's purchasing funds should almost certainly be reserved for this.²³

Although Baxandall saw the function of the new gallery as educational, demonstrating to the public how art developed over the century, he believed that this could only be achieved by showing works by the acknowledged masters. The masters were principally those already recognised by the collection at MoMA:

As you walk through MOMA's permanent collection, you are aware of seeing a succession of works by artists whose uniqueness has been established in the authoritative literature and whose distinctive stylistic traits are easily recognizable... Individual artists acquire significance – art historical importance – according to how much they contributed to the evolution of the total scheme.²⁴

Baxandall's approach would receive greater scrutiny today. A recent essay by the philosopher, Hilde Hein, exploring the function of the museum as an institution, states:

It is not necessary that all museums gratify the same interests. Even second-rate museums have their place in the world, as does bad art. They give us instances for comparison and sharpen our sensibility. There is a pleasure in assessing them that is unlike the reverential bow to the masterpiece.²⁵

For Baxandall, however, the reverential bow to the masterpiece was precisely what he believed was the function of the institution that was being formed. There is still the reverential aura of the masterpiece even in the field of modern art, and it was this principle that determined the formation of the SNGMA's collection. It was regarded as the main priority: 'Nowhere in Scotland can people at present make contact with a reasonably representative selection of works by the more important foreign painters and sculptors of the present century. This is a most serious need which should be

²³ Ibid., p. 2.

²⁴ Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, 'The Museum of Modern Art As Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis', in *Marxist Perspectives*, 4, 1978, p. 34

²⁵ Hilde Hein, 'Assuming Responsibility: Lessons from Aesthetics', in Hugh H. Genoways, *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham, MD; Oxford: Alta Mira Press, 2006), p. 5.

satisfied as soon as possible'.²⁶ As an expression of the intention of the collection, the statement is explicit: it is to provide the people of Scotland with the opportunity to see original works by the masters of modern art. The interpretation of 'national' was to provide the nation with a comprehensive overview of modern art, not to show predominantly the art of the nation. Such an interpretation has, however, consistently provoked controversy amongst those who would prefer instead to give prominence to local artists.

The decision to collect only masterpieces contradicted earlier intentions. The original report of the Royal Commission in 1930 had expressly declared that a museum of modern art should be a collection of works of art, not of historical specimens. In this interpretation the modern art gallery is viewed as fundamentally different to a gallery of historical art, less concerned with having a complete set of examples than with showing new works. Such an interpretation of the role, however, cannot continue beyond a certain point, once a collection has been formed, as the collection automatically transforms the works in it into 'examples'. It can only persist in the *musée de passage*, not within the permanent collection of a working museum. As soon as one adopts the standards of a permanent museum, the freedom and risk-taking potential of a *musée de passage* is lost, and the resulting collection is essentially the same as one of historical art.

The inadequacy of the purchasing grant was immediately apparent at the first Board meeting to consider possible purchases: a Picasso *Negro Period Figure* of 1908 was priced at £33,000 and a Braque *Still Life* at £16,000. Notwithstanding the discrepancy between the prices and the money available, the Board upheld the policy decision to wait for the best works by the most important artists. A Cubist-period Picasso and Braque were considered essential, despite the price, as they were deemed the foundation stone for the collection. Baxandall drew no distinction between building up a modern art collection and developing a historical one. The problem for the SNGMA, however, was more complex because they had already missed out on sixty years of artistic production, but unless they began collecting contemporary art, they would always be left in the position of having to 'catch up'.

²⁶ 'Memorandum on the Proposed Scope of the Collection', p. 1. GMA A33/1/3/3/1.

The first purchase made specifically for the new gallery was a work by Walter Sickert, *A Portrait of Israel Zangwill*. Sickert appeared on Baxandall's list of English artists considered essential for the collection (see Appendix F). The work was offered to the Gallery at a reasonable price in March 1959, when preparations were underway for the opening, demonstrating the idiosyncratic nature of the art market. Although the Gallery had drawn up a list of proposed purchases, it then had to wait for the opportunity to arise to make these purchases. The Gallery had to establish contacts with dealers or collectors of modern art and let them know what they would be interested in. At £1,800, the Sickert purchase was within budget, but nevertheless it gives an indication of how long it would take to build up a decent collection. The work was a safe choice: it was not a challenging work likely to arouse the type of outrage other works might have done. Sickert was the subject of a major centenary exhibition at the Tate in 1960, and was therefore clearly in vogue at the time. Although he was one of the artists considered essential to the collection, this particular work has perhaps not retained an obviously modern quality. However much one refers to the 'established canon', it is a shifting measure, and it is impossible to guarantee that a work will retain favour.



Figure 5: Walter Sickert, *A Portrait of Israel Zangwill*

The second purchase was an oil painting by Matthew Smith, *La Femme de cirque*, costing £2,800. It too seems a safe choice, a figurative work by a respected English artist, whose exhibition in 1953 had attracted much positive comment. His knighthood in 1954 confirmed him as an establishment figure, and his recognition at

the Venice Biennale increased his artistic status. Like the Sickert, the work has perhaps not retained the vitality it was then seen to have, but Smith occupies a position of relevance among English artists of the first half of the twentieth century, so the acquisition represents a useful addition to the overall collection.



Figure 6: Matthew Smith, *Femme de cirque*

The other potential source of acquisitions was gifts from private collectors. On this front, the gallery was more fortunate. Prior to opening, Alexander Maitland, one of the Trustees, announced his intention to donate twenty-three works from his collection of nineteenth and twentieth century art to the National Galleries of Scotland, several of which were immediately assigned to the new Modern Gallery, including the early Picasso, *Mother and Child*, of 1902. Other works in this donation, including the Cézanne and a Gauguin, were intended for the GMA once it could apply the longer time-frame, starting with Cézanne. In fact, even when the Gallery finally moved to larger premises, the earlier start date was never applied, and the GMA has remained dedicated to art after 1900.

Other donations came from supporters of the project. Alexander J. McNeill Reid, son of Alex Reid, the Glasgow dealer responsible for introducing many Impressionist works to Scottish collectors, wrote to Baxandall in January 1960 informing him of his intention to donate a large painting by the French artist, Charles Dufresne, *The Rape of Europa*, of 1924, ‘to start the collection of French paintings, in the hope that it may inspire others to do likewise’.²⁷ Another keen collector originally from Scotland, Elizabeth Watt, wrote to Baxandall, opening her letter with the direct question ‘would you like to have a Zadkine?’, an offer that was gratefully accepted, resulting in the acquisition of *The Dance*, of 1927.²⁸

These gifts were all from local collectors, but the Scottish connection even stretched across the Atlantic, with the donation of a series of works presented by Mr and Mrs Macdonell, of Sarasota, Florida, on the day of opening. This gift, which included an abstract painting by the English artist, Edward Wadsworth, *Composition – Crank and Chain* (GMA 768) and a drawing by Graham Sutherland, *Thistles and Sun* (GMA 763), was given in recognition of the Scottish founders of Sarasota 175 years earlier, an unexpected but welcome source.²⁹

All the gifts were gratefully received additions to the meagre collection, but they illustrate again the random spirit that lies behind such gestures from the public. Works that enter a collection in this way do not conform to the organic evolution of planned acquisitions. They cannot be seen as contributing to the ‘meaning’ that the collection wishes to convey. Nevertheless, such gifts were very welcome, and the gallery did try to predict possible future donations, and incorporate the predictions into their purchasing policy. Despite the international scope of these first gifts, the Trustees were convinced that over the coming years they were much more likely to receive Scottish works than international, and therefore felt less pressure to use the purchase grant for these works.

One way to acquire works by important artists was to focus on works on paper; drawings and prints. The prices for these were much more affordable, and the top floor of Inverleith House was set aside for this display. Here the Gallery could really begin to collect works illustrating the major developments of modern art. During the

²⁷ Letter dated 6 December 1959, in GMA accession file.

²⁸ Letter dated 24 April 1960, in GMA Accession file.

²⁹ The gift is recorded in *Scotsman*, 10 August 1960.

first year alone, examples of works on paper by Matisse, Picasso, Arp, Klee and Kokoschka had all been purchased, demonstrating the Gallery's commitment to international art.

It is interesting to notice works by two of the artists already included in the collection, Kokoschka and Klee. Kokoschka was the only international artist represented in Scotland's collection of oil paintings, and the addition of a colour lithograph by him (*The Greyhound*, GMA 772) illustrates the natural tendency to build on what one already has. The same was true for the Klee: the National Gallery had received a Klee watercolour, *Threatening Snowstorm* (GMA 1015), from Anna Blair in memory of her brother, the former Trustee, R.K. Blair, in 1952. The purchase in 1960 of the lithograph, *Tightrope Walker* (GMA 762), added depth to this holding, allowing a greater sense of the artist's style and working methods than could be gleaned from a single image. This is the essence of any collection; there is always a desire to build on what is already present, and to make more sense of a work than is possible with only an isolated example.

First Keeper

Although the Board were unanimous in agreeing to save the purchase fund and allow it to accumulate in order to buy fewer but more prestigious works, they were aware that, in the meantime, the only way the gallery could promote itself was through the temporary exhibitions it held. This brought its own set of difficulties.³⁰ The running of the new gallery would clearly require considerable enterprise from its staff, and in January 1961 Baxandall informed the Trustees that it was now 'essential that an Assistant Keeper be employed for the new Gallery'.³¹ No additional staff had been appointed when the Gallery opened, with only a small team of warders actually assigned to be on the premises: this indicates the extent to which it was seen as an 'outstation' of the NGS, not a radically different type of gallery.

³⁰ Baxandall reported to the Trustees in October 1960: '... loans which will be necessary until a permanent collection has been built up would become increasingly difficult to obtain, and that it would soon be necessary to consider whether additional curatorial staff should be employed to search for, and arrange the showing of, suitable works and to organise other activities of the Gallery.'

³¹ Board Room Minutes, January 1961.

The Board agreed, and the post was subsequently advertised. In the meantime, the gallery proceeded with its first major purchase, a large sculpture by the English sculptor, Henry Moore, *Two piece Reclining Figure No. 2*, of 1960. Moore had been identified, alongside Ben Nicholson, as the most significant English artists to include in the collection:

Because since the war the reputation of British art abroad has probably stood higher than at any time since the death of Constable, and because the chief causes of this are the sculpture of Moore and the painting of Nicholson, the representation of both these artists by important works seems the most urgent need when the Gallery opens.³²

Again this points to the international vision held for the Gallery; even the choice of works by English artists was determined by their reputation abroad. There is something almost perverse about the first major purchase being an outdoor work, considering the desperate need to have works to put on the walls, but Moore's pre-eminent position made the purchase a relatively safe choice. Moore's works were in great demand, and Baxandall wanted to ensure that the SNGMA ordered one early in its life. He sought permission from the Trustees to use almost an entire year's purchase fund, £7,000. The particular topographical situation of the gallery set on the brow of a hill within the Botanic gardens provided a magnificent setting for the work, framed against the Edinburgh skyline. The purchase, however, aroused considerable controversy, eliciting a long letter from the Saltire Society in October 1961, expressing anger at the decision to spend a whole year's fund on a work by an English artist.³³ For many people in Scotland, the function of the Gallery was to represent Scottish art above all else, but from the start, the Board and the Director were clear that they interpreted its function in broader terms. This has remained one of the most persistent tensions in the relationship between the GMA and the local public.

Lord Crawford, then Chairman of the Trustees, and deeply committed to the international scope of the new collection, replied at considerable length: alluding to the specific circumstances surrounding art purchases, he explained why it was

³²'Suggestions for purchasing for the Gallery of Modern Art', considered by the Board of Trustees, 20 January 1960. GMA A33/1/3/3/1. (See Appendix F).

³³ Letter from Saltire Society, 17 October 1961: 'The Committee are perturbed that the claims of Scottish Art ... are being overlooked by the one Gallery which, the Committee would have expected, should have as the nucleus of its collection the work of living Scottish artists or of those recently deceased.' GMA A33/1/3/3/1.

impossible to draw up a rigid acquisition programme.³⁴ The Gallery had had the opportunity to purchase the Sickert, the Smith and the Moore, but this did not imply any favouring of English art over anything else. He went on to explain his understanding of the title:

... the Trustees should bear in mind the name of the Gallery which it is their duty to administer. It is the "Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art", and not the "National Gallery of Modern Scottish Art". If it were the latter, their task would be the simpler one of confining their purchase to modern Scottish Art: but as it is the former and more ambitious name, they have the far more difficult task of covering the modern art of the world. In view of this I believe that the Trustees' aim should be to provide Scotland with a collection of the best contemporary art in whatever countries it might be found...

But the difficulty of the task should not, I am convinced, ever tempt the Trustees to forget it by lowering their sights. Nor should they fail to remember that no National Gallery has ever acquired, or can ever acquire, international recognition unless it owns great works of art from other countries as well as from its own.

This underlines the commitment undertaken by those in charge of the new institution. Even though they were starting from such a limited position, they were determined to work towards 'international recognition'. Crawford addressed the further criticism raised by the Saltire Society, that the work of Moore had not yet stood 'the test of time':

Re Moore – You write that his work "has still to undergo the severe test of the passing of time". This is true of all modern art. But, as it is the duty of the Trustees to buy modern art, they cannot await time's verdict. Every purchase they make involves a risk; a risk which they have to take.³⁵

Crawford's reply can be seen as a manifesto for the new institution's ambitious plans. On one point made by the Saltire Society, however, the Gallery was able to comply: they had urged that in selecting someone as Assistant Keeper, 'a suitable candidate be obtained from Scotland itself'. Within a month of this exchange, Douglas Hall had been appointed to the role, the first direct recruit to the new institution. Hall, who had been working at the City Art Gallery in Manchester, took up the post in November. He reflected that his selection was in large part due to nationality:

I think I got the job in Edinburgh probably because I was one of the few native Scots who had the background they wanted even though I wasn't a functioning

³⁴ Reply from Lord Crawford, 21 October 1961: 'The Committee's chief concern is, I think, lest the Trustees' policy should be to emphasise English at the expense of Scottish Art. This concern is natural because it is based on the fact that during the Gallery's first year more English than Scottish Art has been acquired: but the Committee will, I am sure, appreciate that no conclusions about the policy of any Gallery can be drawn from what it happens to have bought in any single year. Purchases must depend on whatever may appear at any moment on the market.' GMA A33/1/3/3/1.

³⁵ Reply from Crawford. GMA A33/1/3/3/1.

art historian. There was some pressure on them to appoint a Scot for what many people thought would be a Gallery of Scottish art...³⁶

Hall was Scottish by birth, although he had spent most of his life in London. When he arrived to take up his new post, he had to share a desk with Colin Thompson (then Assistant Keeper at the National Gallery) in the Board Room at the Mound, as no provisions had been made for office space in Inverleith House, reiterating that it had been conceived as an outpost of the National Gallery rather than a new, independent establishment. After a few cramped weeks of such desk-sharing, an office was created within the new premises simply by fitting a door and erecting a couple of shelves, and the gallery thus began its first phase of active life. Hall later recalled the particular difficulties facing the gallery: '[the purchase grant] was not large enough to finance the type of high-grade acquisitions hoped for, unless at very long intervals. From that fact arose a continuing tension between the claims of 'masterpieces' and all other claims on the funds.'³⁷

In fact, within a few months of his arrival, Hall started to question the approach that had been approved, expressing doubts about the agreed rate of growth for the collection. Having assessed the situation, he suggested a radical alternative: to adopt a non-retrospective policy, focussing on works produced after 1945. He saw this approach as better suited to a gallery dedicated to modern art, and pointed out that it would be more within reach of the limited funds available: '... [this] is the most courageous option, and in the long run the most likely to succeed in forming an important collection. The result would be more stimulating to practising artists, and would give the representation of recent Scottish painting far greater point.'³⁸ He believed that the approved slow, steady approach was inappropriate for the newly-established Modern Art Gallery, and advocated a different policy that would better reflect the essential purpose of new institution:

For the NGS or any existing gallery with a fine collection nobody could dispute that occasional very highly selective purchases are the correct policy. But I think that such a policy if applied to a new gallery must of necessity give it the character of a museum of past achievements, one which will be representative only of the most widely accepted achievements of the first three or four decades of this century. It would be a collection formed entirely on hindsight, and while such a policy would, in time and given enough funds, provide a choice group of

³⁶ Transcript of interview with Patrick Elliott in February 1999, p. 5. A copy of this transcript is kept, uncatalogued, in the curators' files in the SNGMA.

³⁷ Douglas Hall, 'Future with a Past: The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art', *Art Monthly*, no. 1, October 1976, p. 16.

³⁸ Undated ms. draft of memorandum from Keeper. GMA A33/1/3/3/1.

fine works by the best names, it would have signally failed to capture anything of the spirit and unique character of the years through which it had lived. This, according to my deep conviction, is precisely the duty we have.³⁹

Hall's anxiety about Baxandall's policy was that it would not produce a collection in keeping with the remit for the only public institution dedicated to 'modern' art. He felt that this unique qualification ought to produce a distinct institution, not one conceived in the same spirit as the existing historical National Gallery. He believed that the new institution would lack the necessary engagement with the contemporary that would identify it as a different type of institution if it persisted in pursuing a retrospective policy. The 'classic modern' works most sought after by Baxandall were already 'historical', however recent; a collection based on such works would fail to fulfil the promise of the Gallery's title. Hall recognised the obvious safety in such a policy; by simply adhering to an already established canon of great works, there would be no risk involved, but the new institution required risk-taking if it was to succeed. He therefore wanted to embark on the less safe route of capturing the essence of contemporary art; he was willing to take the risks that Clark had alluded to in his opening remarks, and questioned whether 'bargain-hunting' was necessarily a better policy choice than 'talent-spotting'.

These concerns strike at the heart of the paradox of any museum of modern art – balancing the historical modern with the contemporary. The dilemma was even more intense in the case of the SNGMA because it lacked any adequate representation of the early period of the 20th century. Between the already-established NGS and the newly formed GMA there was clearly a responsibility to cover the important trends of the early years of the 20th century, but Hall thought filling this gap should not be an exclusive priority of the new Gallery, particularly given the limited finances available. Hall's interpretation may have exaggerated the degree of risk aversion inherent in the agreed strategy. Certainly Lord Crawford's response to the Saltire Society's criticism of the Henry Moore acquisition had justified that purchase on the grounds of the need to take risks. Hall was worried, however, that this was not the prevailing attitude. He detected a lack of willingness to take a chance on works: 'Everybody who knows anything about the matter is reconciled to the fact that there must be failures if a modern collection is to be built up. My point is that without a generous policy there will be no successes, only a sterile underlining of accepted

³⁹ Memo to Baxandall, 28 September 1962. GMA A33/1/3/3/2.

judgements'.⁴⁰ Hall's argument was that the potential benefits of the successes would outweigh the failures, and that this was the only way to achieve a collection that was not simply a replica of all other collections of modern art. This remained his approach throughout his long tenure at the Gallery, and it explains why the SNGMA has managed, against the initial odds and despite the restricted budget, to build up a well-respected collection of interesting works.

Hall adroitly pinpointed the difference between the two positions:

You see the GMA as a kind of extension to the National Gallery, differing only in being extended some way into this century. ... I cannot help wishing to do everything possible to propagate a more expansive view of the GMA's functions. The steps I would like to see the Trustees taking are, to agree in principle that we have a duty to collect contemporary art and if possible to do so willingly and not grudgingly as a distraction from the real business of saving up for a Braque; and secondly if possible to devote a set part of our resources to it.⁴¹

The fundamental issue here is the essential character of a museum specifically dedicated to modern art, and how this might differ from other art museums. For Baxandall, the only difference was the time period covered; otherwise the gallery should adopt the same policy of selecting a few prestigious specimens to illustrate the evolution of art through the century. Hall, instead, felt there was (or should be) a clear distinction between the collecting activities of a GMA and those of a museum of historic art. He took a much broader view of what might be acceptable for the GMA to purchase and was not convinced by the policy of only purchasing works of 'top quality':

Naturally we have to ... make sure that nothing of inferior quality enters the collection. But I think there is a difference between that and insisting on pre-eminent quality, because pre-eminence is highly elusive and if openly avowed as an object could so easily provide merely a funk-route or lead to as many missed opportunities as negligence would. If a fine and characteristic work of an artist we want to represent is available, I think we ought to do everything possible to get it and not wait in the hope that something still better might turn up later.⁴²

The distinction Hall draws here is an important one: he recognises the absolute requirement to maintain a high standard of quality in all purchases, but he rejects the idea that only those works, or artists, considered canonical should be acquired, particularly if waiting for such masterpieces to become available for purchase means delaying the process of forming a worthwhile collection. He suggests that waiting

⁴⁰ Memo to Baxandall, 28 September 1962. GMA A33/1/3/3/2.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

indefinitely for the perfect example of an artist's work could prove detrimental to the healthy growth of the collection. In the early years at MoMA, Barr had expressed similar beliefs to Hall on the question of high standards:

... a rigidly high standard of acquisition [...] may prove a boomerang for the more guesses one makes the more chance there is of being right ten years from now – and the mistakes of an acquisition committee will then be readily forgiven providing they are on the right side of commission and not of omission... Fine works not acquired are often irremediably lost.⁴³

Central to this discussion is the notion of permanence inscribed in museum collections; knowing that a purchase will remain forever in a collection increases the need for certainty of judgement. There is no provision in public galleries in the UK for de-accessioning works (unlike at MoMA, for example), so all purchases represent a permanent addition to the collection.

The issue also throws light on the particularities of the art market, where it is impossible to predict when works will appear, or exactly how much they might cost. Planning to acquire such works can only ever be vague. Hall was evidently concerned that too strict an insistence on 'top-quality' could lead to endless procrastination, waiting for the ever-elusive perfect example of an artist's work, thus preventing the development of other aspects of the collection.

Officially the retrospective policy remained, but the early acquisitions show considerable flexibility. In 1962, two works by Ben Nicholson were acquired, as well as a sculpture by Reg Butler.⁴⁴ In 1963, the SNGMA bought the first Dubuffet for a public collection in Britain, *Villa sur la route* (GMA 830) of 1957.⁴⁵ Equally, the purchase of a work by Kirchner, *Japanisches Theater* (GMA 911), in 1965, at a time when German Expressionism was not yet fashionable, points to a self-confidence unconcerned with the opinion of others. Craig Richardson, in *Scottish Art since 1960*,

⁴³ Quoted in Ross, p. 22.

⁴⁴ The works were: *January 1962 (White Relief, Paros)* (GMA 813) and *June 1961 [Green Goblet and Blue Square]* (GMA 812) by Ben Nicholson, and *Girl* (GMA 809) by Reg Butler.

⁴⁵ This was the second Dubuffet to be considered. The earlier one had been rejected because of the unstable medium: 'The snag from our point of view is that it is a presumably rather unstable collage. A private collector has every right to spend several thousands on a work that may just about last his lifetime before it alters too seriously and possibly begins to break up, but I know that our Trustees would be happier with an oil.' Ms. letter from Baxandall, 22 November 1962. Hall drafted a reply: 'As far as Dubuffet collages are concerned, it is impossible to argue about the future, unless on analogy, and I'm not sure there is one. Picasso or Braque collages aren't regarded as untouchables. Anyway Dubuffet is a great experimentalist and there may well be an unknown element even in 'oils'. This problem has become increasingly complex, and has to be addressed frequently today. GMA A33/1/3/3/2.

is highly critical of the SNGMA's early collecting policy. He refers to 'risk avoidance in modern art', and suggests that this was the reason for a lack of engagement with the contemporary.⁴⁶ In fact, Hall had made an early attempt to encourage a more contemporary-based strategy, but as noted here, he found little support for this, and the institution came to be regarded as increasingly conservative in its approach.

Early years exhibition programme

Despite the inauspicious start reported at the opening, the new gallery achieved a great deal over the first few years. The principal means of promoting the institution was through an intense programme of temporary exhibitions: this made the small gallery known to a much wider public. The first exhibition, held in the summer of 1961, was of Henry Moore drawings from the collection of Kenneth Clark. 51,000 people attended, proving that the gallery's launch had been successful and the public's curiosity aroused. The location was proving unexpectedly favourable, as many visitors to the Gardens took advantage of the opportunity to visit the new gallery as well. It was obviously important that this level of interest be maintained, and while the process of building a collection from scratch proceeded slowly, a varied programme of temporary exhibitions would have to provide the means.

Soon after arriving in November 1961 Hall began preparations for the next summer. Baxandall had already been in touch with Helen Sutherland, a major collector of modern art, proposing an exhibition of her collection. Baxandall's first contact preceded the gallery's opening in the summer of 1960: he enquired whether she might be willing to lend works from her collection for an exhibition early in the new gallery's life.⁴⁷ Sutherland initially declined the request because she had already agreed to lend her collection to an exhibition in Manchester that year. When Hall arrived in 1961, however, he took up the correspondence, and was able to discuss the

⁴⁶ 'For Douglas Hall ... and later Richard Calvocoressi, the worst excesses in visual art were encouraged by the recent importation of relatively new styles ... and must be kept at a distance.' Craig Richardson, *Scottish Art since 1960: historical reflections and contemporary overviews* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2011), p. 110.

⁴⁷ Baxandall explained the reason for his request: 'We have available a fair number of modern paintings by Scotsmen, but for modern Foreign and English art we have to start from very nearly nothing. We have been given a separate purchase grant for this new Gallery, but with present day prices it will not go very far. To begin with, we shall have to depend a great deal on loans and gifts, and I am particularly anxious to have some good things for the first few months of the Gallery's active life...' Letter to Sutherland, 15 June 1960. GMA A33/1/2/6.

previous Manchester exhibition and its shortcomings in terms of adequate display. He managed to persuade Sutherland that an exhibition in the Edinburgh gallery would show off her collection to much better advantage, and she eventually agreed.⁴⁸ Hall dealt with potential exhibitors with astute diplomacy, often striking up long-term friendships with them, and handling every aspect of the preparation of exhibitions with professionalism. The correspondence for the exhibition gives an insight into how important it was to establish good relations with major collectors. Helen Sutherland mentioned more than once how much she appreciated the extra care taken by Hall in arranging all aspects of the exhibition, and ultimately this appreciation was transformed into concrete benefit when she donated several important works to the Gallery in 1965, including the Ben Nicholson painting, *Walton Wood Cottage* (GMA 930).

The Sutherland Collection was the first of a full season of exhibitions. Hall had also arranged to host two Arts Council exhibitions, one of works by Keith Vaughan shown inside the Gallery and the other, an exhibition of contemporary British sculpture in the grounds behind Inverleith House. This feature was one of the location's greatest assets. The lawn behind the house had been the private garden of the Keeper, but it had been made available to the Gallery for the placing of outdoor sculpture. This proved an excellent way to alert the Garden-visiting public to the presence of the new institution, and encourage casual visitors to come in.

The main exhibition of the season was of works by Paul Klee, held during the busy Festival period. This exhibition signals the first attempt to use the works in the embryonic permanent collection as the starting point for wider displays, and was Hall's first opportunity to mount an exhibition of a major European artist. Having negotiated a major loan of works on paper from the Paul Klee Foundation in Berne, he hoped to extend the display to include some oil paintings as well and began contacting private collectors in the UK. The first collector he contacted, Lady Hulton, whose collection had been shown at the Tate in 1959, was only willing to lend the whole collection: she would not allow a selection of works to be chosen. This immediately highlighted the difficulty that the small temporary venue was going to

⁴⁸ 'Your generous contribution to the exhibition at Manchester was I'm afraid seen to little advantage in the rather murky galleries there. On the other hand works such as you collect would look magnificent at IH. Its light and airy rooms do in fact possess something of the clarity of atmosphere I remember in your own house.' Letter from Hall to Sutherland, 20 November 1961. GMA A33/1/2/6.

pose. Hall had to decline, as it was impossible to fit all the works alongside the already promised works from Bern. His enquiries among colleagues in the modern art world to find another collector who might be willing to lend works led him to Mrs Ogden Stewart, another major Klee collector. She was very keen to help as much as possible, explaining that her husband was ‘Scotch’.⁴⁹ Her collection had been on display at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, but she gave instructions for it to be transferred to Edinburgh in time for the show. The resulting exhibition was a great success. Hall, with support also from Mrs Stewart, garnered as much publicity as possible, with reviews in the major Sunday newspapers and in *Apollo* and the *Burlington Magazine*. The Burlington review commented on the auspicious combination of art and nature:

Walking through a large garden, quietly contemplating trees and flowers, is an ideal preparation for seeing paintings by Paul Klee. One had this pleasant experience at the Klee exhibition at the SNGMA, which is situated in the middle of the Royal Botanic Garden. ... One’s awareness of Klee’s poetic vision, far removed from the noisy bustle of modern streets, was heightened by a setting in nature, from which the artist himself drew so much inspiration.⁵⁰

The Klee exhibition highlighted, therefore, both the benefits and the drawbacks of the temporary venue. It offered a natural setting that could enhance appreciation of much twentieth century art. Its restricted size, however, prevented it from accommodating either large numbers of canvases, or large-sized canvases.⁵¹

The season ended with another private collection, this time from a local collector, Robert A. Lillie. Lillie had a vast collection of modern Scottish paintings, with a particularly strong representation of works by William Gillies. A pattern was thus set that was to be maintained over the coming years of offering a wide selection of different art from a variety of sources, balancing the local and the international, and

⁴⁹ Donald Ogden Stewart was an American of Scottish descent. He had been a Hollywood scriptwriter, but had left America during the McCarthy years. GMA A33/1/2/2.

⁵⁰ *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 104, no. 715, October 1962, p. 443.

⁵¹ The particular requirements of the building and the need to favour smaller works were referred to in further correspondence with Mrs Stewart: ‘If it would suit your convenience to leave any other part of your collection here for any length of time, need I say what a great privilege it would be for us to show it. Owing to the particular nature of this building, we should especially welcome the smaller items such as (besides Klee), the Chagall, Feininger, Giacometti, Leger, Modigliani and Picasso drawings, or the Schwitters collages. As the building was originally a house, the scale is domestic and such pieces would, I fancy, look better than in a large gallery such as the Tate.’ Letter from Hall, 12 April 1962, GMA A33/1/2/2. Hall here makes a virtue of the size by pointing out that smaller works will benefit from being displayed in the domestic scale of Inverleith House, but he was aware that this was a minor consolation for not being able to show many aspects of recent art.

the established with the contemporary. In this way, Hall tried to juggle the multiple expectations implied by the title of the Gallery.

The following year an equally intense and balanced schedule of exhibitions was planned, but unforeseen events disrupted its smooth progress. The season was due to begin with an Arts Council exhibition entitled *Constructivism in England*. This had to be cancelled at the last minute because the works returning from an American tour of the exhibition were caught up in a dock strike in New York. Hall wrote to David Thomas at the Arts Council, reminding him of Edinburgh's particular circumstances: 'It is easy to overlook the fact that unlike many galleries we get by far the largest proportion of our visitors between April and October... I profoundly hope that nothing of this sort will happen to the American Drawings Exhibition'.⁵² The remark held a Cassandra-like prescience, as unfortunately this was precisely what did happen, leaving the summer programme much reduced. Such incidents illustrate how many factors are involved in the running of a gallery. When trying to assess an institution's achievements, it is essential to remember that some events are outside of anyone's control. A gallery's success derives also from an ability to negotiate awkward situations.

The 1964 exhibition season proceeded more smoothly, with the same balance between 'classic modern', contemporary, international and Scottish. The highlight for the Festival slot of August was the most ambitious exhibition undertaken by Hall since arriving in Edinburgh. **The Graphic Works of Edvard Munch** held particular resonance in Edinburgh because, as the official Press release pointed out: 'When in 1932 the SSA included ten of his paintings in their annual exhibition, it was an act in the best Scottish tradition of independence from English thought'.⁵³ Undoubtedly the historical reference was intended to appeal to the local audience, and was presumably aimed at encouraging pride in their fellow-citizens' earlier audacity, and therefore prompting a desire to emulate it.

The exhibitions of 1965 show a similar balance; an exhibition of drawings by Arshile Gorky in April, followed by **Sam Francis and Richard Diebenkorn; 2 American Painters, Abstract and Figurative** in May, then two exhibitions of Scottish art – one

⁵² Letter dated 6 December 1962. GMA A33/1/2/12.

⁵³ Typescript of press information. GMA A33/1/2/16.

of works by the popular Scottish Colourist, J.D. Fergusson, the other of contemporary Scottish painters. English art was also covered in the exhibition of works by Victor Pasmore, while European art was again shown during the important Festival period with two concurrent exhibitions of works by Giorgio Morandi and Julius Bissier. In the preparations for both of these exhibitions, Hall emphasised the advantages of the gallery's scale.⁵⁴ By making a virtue out of necessity, Inverleith House was soon regarded as a highly desirable venue for the display of many types of modern art. Hall later remarked that perhaps he had given too much consideration to the issue of space, but it remains true that all exhibitions held in the unquestionably restricted space of Inverleith House worked in harmony with the space rather than fighting against it, and on several occasions, reviews of exhibitions also shown elsewhere mentioned the particularly favourable setting of Inverleith House.⁵⁵

Quest for more space

Nevertheless the problems generated by the diminutive size of the building were becoming increasingly severe. The temporary location in Inverleith was not intended to continue indefinitely, but the assigned premises on Queen Street had still not been vacated. In 1963 the gallery was offered a site within the proposed South Side University Redevelopment Scheme in exchange for the promised York Buildings. A memorandum from the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works noted the evolving schemes within the centre of the city, and how these affected the plans for the new GMA.⁵⁶ It is interesting to note the shifting expectations of use for art galleries. The

⁵⁴ Sample letter to prospective lenders: 'This gallery is a recent foundation, occupying a rather small but beautiful building of which the rooms are exceptionally suited to the work of Morandi and other artists of a quiet and classical order.' GMA A33/1/2/22.

⁵⁵ For example, re the Pier Gallery Collection shown in 1979. Hall himself had written: 'It does not look too well at the Tate, but it should go very well in here.' After the show opened in Edinburgh, Erlend Brown, curator of the Pier Gallery, wrote 'You were quite right about the scale of the works suiting your space. The four domestic scale rooms had more of an affinity with Margaret Gardiner's house in Hampstead.' GMA A33/1/2/104.

⁵⁶ Copy of memorandum from Mr. Patrick of Ministry of Public Buildings & Works, entitled 'National Galleries of Scotland – Accommodation': 'Since it was decided to earmark the site in Queen Street... there have been important changes in the plans for the redevelopment of the city. Current developments show that the area around St. Andrew Square is becoming wholly commercial in character and this will link with the area of comprehensive redevelopment around St James' Square in which commercial buildings are also likely to predominate... On the other hand, the University of Edinburgh, with the support of the Corporation, have prepared a plan for an area of comprehensive redevelopment lying to the south of Chambers Street and between Middle Meadow Walk and the Pleasance... The university would welcome a large Crown building in this area and have suggested that a substantial site immediately opposite the Old Quadrangle ... could be earmarked for this purpose.' GMA A33/1/3/3/2.

commercial surroundings anticipated for the Queen Street area were not seen as conducive to the use of an art gallery, whereas the link to an educational facility was viewed positively. The offer was duly considered by the Board of Trustees, but rejected on the grounds that it would be wrong to give up ‘the solid substance of the York Buildings site for the somewhat shadowy possibility of a site of inadequate size which might be available, twenty years hence’.⁵⁷ It is difficult to ignore the irony of rejecting anything as ‘shadowy’ compared to York Buildings, which remained the preferred site for over 40 years without ever being released by the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works. One can only speculate on how the institution might have evolved there, but it seems probable that a site within the heart of the university might have encouraged progress in a different direction, given the different potential audience and the more modern architectural surroundings. The accusation of excess ‘gentility’ first levelled at Inverleith House in the Botanic Gardens would have been less sustainable within the new university context.

Following the rejection of the university site, a proposal materialised for Cramond House, another suburban villa similar to Inverleith House. This offered more space but little else that was better than the existing arrangement, and its less accessible location worked against it. Contrary to early fears, Inverleith House had proven popular with visitors. It was not in the city centre, but was well-served by public transport and there was adequate parking available around the perimeter of the Gardens. An exhibition review of 1965 comments:

When the SNGMA opened, people...apologised for its location, fearing intended donors would be deterred from climbing to what must be one of the highest inhabited points within the city limits... Faint hearts were confounded when... it turned out people came in great numbers... Does any public gallery, anywhere, command a nobler prospect?⁵⁸

The setting had indeed proved to be an unanticipated asset; the public appreciated the opportunity to visit a gallery inside another recreational venue. The exceptionally beautiful surroundings enhanced the visitor experience in a unique way, and provided the new institution with a ready-made audience. Its genteel appearance could even be a benefit, in that the public was not deterred from entering. Nevertheless, the space available within Inverleith House was woefully inadequate. The Annual Report of 1967 states:

⁵⁷ Letter from Baxandall to Lord Crawford, 27 June 1963. GMA A33/1/3/3/2.

⁵⁸ ‘A small-scale feast’, *Sunday Times*, 5 September 1965.

In the eighth year of the Gallery's existence ... although Scotland has a gallery of twentieth-century pictures, it is a very long way from possessing a museum of modern art in the sense taken for granted in Europe or North America. An institution of that kind is able to keep pace with the development of the visual arts, provide background which can make that development understandable, and encourage links with the other arts.

The lack of space was preventing the gallery from growing into the type of institution capable of actively contributing to Scotland's cultural environment, as had always been envisaged, and as was still the professed ambition of the Board. The distinction drawn between a gallery of twentieth century pictures and an effective museum of modern art is instructive: to achieve the latter required a much greater commitment of space and resources, and these were still being denied to Scotland.

A useful comparison can be made with the Moderna Museet in Stockholm during the same period. The Director there was Pontus Hultén, who later described the activities of the Gallery:

People were capable of coming to the museum every evening; they were ready to absorb everything we could show them. There were times when there was something on every night. We had many friends who were working in music, dance, and theatre, for whom the museum represented the only available space, since opera houses and theatres were out of the question – their work was viewed as too “experimental.” So interdisciplinarity came about all by itself. The museum became a meeting ground for an entire generation.⁵⁹

This type of activity was impossible for the SNGMA in its current location, primarily because the Gallery had to respect the opening hours of the Gardens. In winter this meant closing at 3.30pm, which left no opportunity for evening events. The experience at the Moderna Museet recalls Cursiter's plans for an ‘art centre’ that would offer a home for all the ‘homeless activities’, but the Botanic location hindered the realisation of this: the ‘frame’ still did not correspond to the ambitions of the institution. Contemporaneously, other ventures began in the city that did offer the type of interdisciplinarity described by Hultén: the Traverse, in particular, which opened in 1963, became the natural home of avant-garde activities. These left the SNGMA looking increasingly conservative by contrast.

It was noted, however, that the location had produced one major benefit; ‘the fact that it is in the Botanical Gardens has meant that many people who would not have

⁵⁹ Obrist, p. 37.

entered a Gallery of Modern Art elsewhere have visited it'.⁶⁰ The obvious solution appeared to be to expand the existing premises, and this possibility was soon being explored.⁶¹ At around this time, Douglas Hall was preparing an exhibition of watercolours by Emil Nolde, which involved a trip to the Seebull Foundation in Germany. David Baxandall suggested that he combine this with a visit to the Louisiana Museum just outside Copenhagen, 'and talk with someone on the staff there about its advantages and otherwise as a working proposition'.⁶²

The Louisiana museum offers an interesting parallel to Edinburgh's gallery. It had opened in 1958, and is situated in a country whose geographical location places it in a similarly 'peripheral' relation to Europe as Scotland. Unlike Edinburgh, it was a privately owned gallery, but it shared an ambition to promote the art of its own country and to introduce international modern art to Denmark. Even more significantly for the SNGMA, the actual building consisted of a nineteenth-century house in the middle of a park, to which had been added a series of modern buildings linked by glass corridors.⁶³ The relationship between the modern additions and the surrounding parkland had been a major feature of the design; similarly, any extension to Inverleith House within the Botanic Gardens would have to consider this very carefully. The proposal gathered momentum when the Standing Commission visited Edinburgh in July 1968, and agreed that an extension would be a good solution.

In July 1969, Baxandall wrote to Ian Robertson at the Scottish Education Department, reiterating the desperate need for expansion and explaining why the best solution was to extend the current venue:

It has already been proved that the public enjoys looking at pictures in the setting that the Garden provides: for the past two years more people have visited Inverleith House in spite of the limited displays its small size allows, than have come to the National Gallery, and more than twice as many as have visited the combined Portrait Gallery and Museum of Antiquities. It therefore seems

⁶⁰ NGS Annual Report 1967.

⁶¹ The Board Room Minutes for June 1967 state: 'It was agreed that the present site was perhaps the most suitable, but it was necessary to explore at the highest level, how much development would be allowed on the site.'

⁶² Memo dated 4 August 1967. GMA A33/1/2/43.

⁶³ Vittorio Lampugnani calls this 'a masterpiece of classically disciplined northern modernism built in 1958-59 – a highly sophisticated spatial composition that combines calm introvertedness with precisely placed openings, quiet attention to art and relaxed contemplation of nature in an astonishingly natural way. The architectural forms used in post war modernism are here impressively placed at the service of a modesty and restraint of the type that had reached its climax in nineteenth-century museum architecture.' V. Lampugnani, 'Insight versus Entertainment: Untimely Meditations on the Architecture of Twentieth-century Art Museums', in S. Macdonald (ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester, 2011), p. 247.

probable that more people would come to the developed gallery we have in mind than would visit a gallery on the York Buildings site.⁶⁴

This comment illustrates the outstanding early success of the SNGMA; after only a few years, in extremely cramped conditions and with severely restricted opening hours in the winter, it had even managed to outperform the well-established and centrally located National Gallery. Much of this success derived from what had turned out to be the felicitous position within a park that people visited in their leisure time. Baxandall continued by pointing out the unique potential offered by the conjunction of gallery and gardens:

But the great advantage of the Garden site is that it would provide the conditions for creating something unique in Britain. The view of the Edinburgh skyline, the Castle, Calton Hill and Arthur's Seat as seen from near Inverleith House, is one of the great urban views in Europe and this would remain part of the complex experience of visiting the developed gallery, as would the constant awareness of the relationship between the new buildings and the garden landscape of which their planning had made them part.⁶⁵



Figure 7: Henry Moore sculptures with Edinburgh skyline behind

The combination of urban view, natural landscape and modern art offered a rich combination of elements that each enhanced the other, providing an exceptional, extended 'frame' for the Gallery. The negotiations continued for the next six years.

Growing ambitions

In the meantime Hall continued working hard to consolidate the early success, with the programme of exhibitions becoming even more intense. In 1966 he put together

⁶⁴ Letter dated 1 July 1969. ED3/344.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

what he considered his most important exhibition to date, *20 Italian Sculptors*.⁶⁶ This had been planned since 1962, but the slow response from the authorities in Rome had delayed progress. Eventually, however, the prospect of ‘trading’ an exhibition of Raeburn and Ramsay produced positive results, and Hall endeavoured to achieve maximum publicity for it. He wrote to all the Arts correspondents in an attempt to generate as much publicity as possible, stating ‘It is ... unusual for such a high-powered exhibition to be sent anywhere but to London, and I am very anxious that it should get really good coverage’.⁶⁷ The reference to London as a benchmark for success suggests an ongoing attempt to match standards set there, already noted at many moments in the history of the institution. The smaller Scottish institution still aspired to a major role.

Hall often showed a missionary predilection for promoting artists more generally out of favour. He was determined to endorse William Johnstone, a Scottish artist who had recently returned to live in Scotland after a long period spent teaching in London. Hall greatly admired his work, and hoped to persuade others of its value. He wrote to a friend:

I do very much hope this exhibition will be a success. William’s work is not universally ingratiating even to those who like modern painting in general, and at this date it has nothing of “le dernier cri” to commend it. I have plunged to a certain extent in promoting it.⁶⁸

Hall hoped to find a London venue for the Johnstone exhibition, and contacted Lawrence Toynbee of the Morley Gallery, stating:

There is always resistance to re-introducing the work of a neglected painter, especially one so close to our day and one who has never made any effort to promote himself. I would expect resistance to Johnstone on all sorts of counts, but I take the fullest responsibility for the exhibition as selected by me...⁶⁹

The strategy of looking beyond the obviously fashionable may also have been Hall’s way of gaining attention for the SNGMA. The size of the institution prevented it from

⁶⁶ The sculptors were Aldo Caló, Cosimo Carlucci, Ettore Colla, Pietro Consagra, Pericle Fazzini, Lucio Fontana, Nino Franchina, Lorenzo Guerrini, Leoncillo Leonardi, Giacomo Manzù, Luigi Mascherini, Umberto Mastroianni, Luciano Minguzzi, Pierluca Degli Innocenti, Arnaldo Pomodoro, Giò Pomodoro, Francesco Somaini and Alberto Viani. The exhibition was finally organised by Arts Council, but full credit was given to Hall for the preparations, and the first showing was in the Botanicals.

⁶⁷ Letter dated 26 July 1966, sent to Cordelia Oliver, the main art correspondent for the *Guardian*, Emilio Coia, Sidney Goodsir Smith, Felix McCulloch, Alan Bold of *Times Educational Supplement*. GMA A33/1/2/32.

⁶⁸ Letter to Sir Michael Culme Seymour, 20 May 1970. GMA A33/1/2/44/5.

⁶⁹ Letter to Toynbee, 1 December 1969. GMA A33/1/2/44/5.

competing with the major London galleries in presenting the best-known artists: instead, by carefully selecting artists currently overlooked elsewhere, it gradually built up a solid reputation for showing unusual high-quality exhibitions. By 1974 Emilio Coia wrote in the Scotsman:

Experience over the years has taught us to look directly towards the SNGMA for the exhibition of genuine quality that wouldn't be easy to find elsewhere; for the exhibition that is of educative value and is habitually – or nearly so – pertinent to our times. And so we look to the Keeper of that life-saving institution, Douglas Hall, who, especially at Festival time, is worth his weight in gold frames.⁷⁰

The following year Hall organised an exhibition of works by Kandinsky. Paul Overy, who was invited to take part in an accompanying lecture series, noted, 'Typically, it is Edinburgh rather than London which is to show the first major Kandinsky for years'.⁷¹ Clearly Hall had been successful at establishing a reputation for his gallery of showing artists with less obvious popular appeal, while still managing to generate interest and respect. The institution had not made inroads into the contemporary avant-garde, but it was succeeding in other areas.



Figure 8: Installation shot of Kandinsky exhibition

The same principle of looking for works which were not currently at the height of fashion had enabled Hall to build up a substantial collection with the very meagre budget assigned to the gallery in its first years. Although he enjoyed the challenge of finding interesting works to include in the collection, he was ambivalent about aspects of public collections. He reflected on the differences between public and private collections:

⁷⁰ *Scotsman*, 19 August 1974.

⁷¹ Letter to Philip Wright, 1 July 1975. GMA A33/1/2/80/2.

A public collection, or at least one such as this which is in its early stages of growth, cannot reflect the very personal preferences or enthusiasms which are essential to a real private collection. It must spread its resources thinly among many different kinds of art in its own field. This, and a necessarily somewhat cold insistence on quality, may lay it open to a charge of soullessness. It is in counteracting this impression of art-collecting that exhibitions of private collections may be so effective. Every true private collection has works in it that are not of “museum quality”. To the owner they are friends with whom he has a private colloquy and to whose faults he is indifferent or indulgent.⁷²

The danger of ‘soullessness’ is reminiscent of Cursiter’s description of how a modern art gallery should not be, simply a lifeless hang of artworks. It is intriguing to note that Hall sees this danger as deriving in part from the ‘cold insistence on quality’. The idea that ‘museum quality’ works are less vibrant or offer less opportunity for colloquy than works with ‘faults’ would seem to imply that a gallery (possibly particularly a ‘national’ gallery) will inevitably develop the unwelcoming atmosphere that Cursiter wanted to avoid. In fact, Hall’s judicious selection of works managed to avoid ‘soullessness’, in part confirming Kenneth Clark’s optimistic prediction that lack of money could prove to be helpful in preventing over-priced fashionable acquisitions. Commentators often referred to the collection of the SNGMA as having much of the charm of a private collection, thereby avoiding the risk of ‘soullessness’.⁷³

The purchase grant had been increased to £20,000 for the five years from 1964-65, but in 1970 the rise to £72,000 per annum for the next five years prompted a major policy reassessment. The institution could finally contemplate achieving its original ambition of acquiring some ‘classics’ of modern art. The prospect led Hall to ponder the true value of this type of purchase:

The question of an ultra-expensive purchase (costing perhaps two years’ purchase grant or even more) has arisen almost entirely in connection with the possible purchase of an analytical cubist work by Picasso or Braque. The thesis is advanced that this is a uniquely important object in as far as the succeeding development of modern art cannot be understood without knowledge of analytical cubism.⁷⁴

⁷² Typescript of catalogue introduction to exhibition of the works from the collection of Peter Davis. GMA A33/1/2/17.

⁷³ A recent article in *The New York Times* (26 March 2011), discussing the imminent move of the Barnes Foundation, praised the now rare ‘ideal of stubborn individualism’, and noted that the result ‘was a museum experience that felt deeply private.’ These qualities were also noted in reports of Hall’s work at the SNGMA, for example, Michael Shepherd’s review of the opening at Belford Road: see Chap. 3, note 78).

⁷⁴ Report entitled ‘Past and Future Purchases for the SNGMA’, 12 January 1970, attached to Board Room Minutes of January 1970.

The debate addresses profound questions about the nature of works within an art collection. Why would any work be viewed as ‘uniquely’ important? Is it because of its intrinsic worth as a work of art, worth that is ‘interior’ to the work, or, conversely, is it because of external factors, such as the work’s place within the narrative determined by art historical judgement? Derrida discusses a similar distinction in ‘Parergon’, in *The Truth in Painting*, where he deconstructs the notion of aesthetic judgement:

Is the palace I’m speaking about beautiful? All kinds of answers can miss the point of the question. If I say, I don’t like things made for idle gawpers, or else, like the Iroquois sachem, I prefer the pubs, or else, in the manner of Rousseau, what we have here is a sign of the vanity of the great who exploit the people in order to produce frivolous things, [...], none of these answers constitutes an intrinsically aesthetic judgment. I have evaluated this palace in terms of *extrinsic* motives, in terms of empirical psychology, of economic relations of production, of political structures, of technical causality, etc.

Now you have to know what you’re talking about, what *intrinsically* concerns the value “beauty” and what remains external to your immanent sense of beauty.⁷⁵

Hall’s questioning of any work’s ‘unique’ importance corresponds to Derrida’s awareness of the multiplicity of extrinsic factors that underlie such judgments. If the work’s unique importance lies in its role as a specimen of something broader and a practical tool essential to the explication of what followed after it, then it is being judged as an object, favouring its extrinsic value as a synecdoche, rather than for its intrinsic aesthetic qualities. To base a purchasing policy on this might undermine the aesthetic integrity of an art gallery. Such judgement also presupposes a univocal view of art. Baxandall’s original insistence on masterpieces depended on a single vision of the canon, and the undisputed position of certain artists at the top of that particular hierarchy. It imbues certain examples with a superior ability to convey an artistic message. Hall, on the other hand, believed that all good works of art make a worthwhile contribution to the complex narrative.⁷⁶

Hall proposed setting aside a fixed amount from the increased annual grant and allowing it to accumulate until a suitable work was found, but still continuing to acquire less expensive works, noting that this would ‘free ourselves from the constant

⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 45.

⁷⁶ In the recent 50th anniversary displays at the GMA, Hall curated a room of his acquisitions, recognising the value of works that do not qualify for ‘masterpiece’ status, but which may therefore be more valuable in understanding the developments. His text for the exhibition stated: ‘When faced with the greatest names of 20th century art, we tend to see them as historical objects. In this room we can look at artists who are only a little less than great, enjoy them and consider what they are about.’ GMA A33/ current records 2010.

conflict between any work that is up for consideration and the theoretical possibility of getting a more important work later'.⁷⁷ The policy proved generally fruitful for the Gallery. Even though the main focus of attention during the 1970s was the pressing need to find larger premises, the process of building up the permanent collection continued. Several important acquisitions were made, including a sculpture by Giacometti, *Woman with her Throat Cut* (GMA 1109), in 1970, a Magritte painting, *The Black Flag* (GMA 1261), in 1972, a Fauve work by Derain, *Collioure* (GMA 1280), in 1973, a Germaine Richier sculpture, *The Runner* (GMA 1315), in 1974, and finally the longed-for Cubist work by Braque, *Le Bougeoir* (GMA 1561), in 1976.



Figure 9: Georges Braque, *Le Bougeoir*

The new system of separating the resources meant there were also purchases of more recent works, including a 1972 Minimalist sculpture by Sol LeWitt, *Five Modular Structures (Sequential Permutations on the Number Five)* (GMA 1308), a 1972 Conceptual piece by Joseph Beuys, *Three Pots for the Poorhouse – Action Object* (GMA 1318), and an early work of 1969 by the Boyle family from the 'London Series', *Addison Crescent Study* (GMA 1304). The collection was thus gradually expanding in many directions, including contemporary art.

⁷⁷ 'Past and Future Purchases', p. 6.

Contemporary purchases – ‘An Olympian Silence’

The report concluded by referring to the acquisition of contemporary works. Hall explained why none of the most recent artistic trends was included among the desiderata: ‘The evolution of art has reached such an evident impasse that it is a good time to take stock of recent movements that seem to have already passed into history. The most recent ideas which are often directed against permanence or any kind of final product, do not lend themselves to tabulation’. This statement clearly marks a strong contrast to his earlier commitment to collecting contemporary works. Is Hall conforming to a frequently noted pattern of rejecting the avant-garde – a trend discussed in Leo Steinberg’s essay ‘Contemporary Art and the Plight of the Public’, in which he suggests that each generation rejects the art of the following one.⁷⁸ Many critics have in fact agreed with Hall; art underwent a period of such radical revision, with the dematerialisation of the art work and the trend for works which sought to subvert the notion of permanence underpinning the *raison d’être* of a museum, that the museum could no longer treat the art object in the same way, and it was appropriate to reflect carefully on the changing relationship to determine how to handle such a seemingly irresolvable dilemma.⁷⁹

A year later, Hall expressed gratitude that lack of space had ‘saved’ them from purchasing ‘too much of the wrong kind of work of the fifties and sixties, so much of which seems already empty and effete’.⁸⁰ The remark was a rare example of the space problems being viewed positively, but it further emphasises the importance of the architectural frame. The admission that art that might have been purchased now seemed ‘empty and effete’ highlights the risk in acquiring the contemporary - that its importance will prove short-lived. At the start, however, Hall had argued that the risk was necessary, and he still recognised that as an institution, they had a responsibility

⁷⁸ Leo Steinberg, ‘Contemporary Art and the Plight of its Public’, *Harper’s Magazine*, January 1962, reprinted in Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: OUP, 1972), pp. 3-16.

⁷⁹ Arthur Danto, for example, writes: ‘The Seventies was a decade in which it must have seemed that history had lost its way. It had lost its way because nothing at all like a discernible direction seemed to be emerging. If we think of 1962 as marking the end of abstract expressionism, then you had a number of styles succeeding one another at a dizzying rate: color-field painting, hard-edged abstraction, French neo-realism, pop, op, minimalism, *arte povera*, and then what got to be called the New Sculpture ... and then conceptual art. Then what seemed to be ten years of nothing much.’ *After the End of Art*, (Princeton; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 13.

⁸⁰ Keeper’s Report on the SNGMA, January 1971. GMA A33/1/3/4/2.

to engage with such trends. By ignoring them, they would be failing in their obligations to the public:

But we have been outflanked by the rift that has appeared in art in the last two years or so, connected with the new generation gap and the general social unrest. [...] The effect of all this is that, to all who are at all engagé with modern art, the Gallery looks far more conservative than it was ever intended it should be, while to the rest it continues to look difficult and “modern” as usual.⁸¹

This statement summarised the danger for the institution. In trying to cater to a variety of audiences, it ended up satisfying none. During the 1960s other artistic enterprises had evolved within Edinburgh, and there was a sense that the GMA was not keeping up with contemporary trends. The Richard Demarco Gallery in particular, which had opened in 1966, developing from the activities at the Traverse, was providing a more vibrant experience of contemporary work, and offering more opportunities for public collaboration:

When it was set up, there was virtually no other gallery in Edinburgh showing contemporary art of an international stamp. The opening of the Richard Demarco Gallery has changed everything. The feverish activity and noise associated with it has thrown the silence of the established bodies into strong relief: the Committee may consider whether it has made the silence seem Olympian or merely ineffectual.⁸²

The expectations when the SNGMA opened of setting the standard for a new type of art museum had fallen short, and other recently-formed institutions highlighted the GMA’s lack of engagement with the contemporary avant-garde.

The reality of art price inflation kept the debate alive within the organisation. In June 1972 one Trustee, Alan Roger, expressed concern after the Committee had failed to secure a work by Brancusi, which had recently sold for £171,000, a sum equal to three-years’ allocation for special purchases. ‘The rate of inflation since our original policy decision, together with the rise in prices of top quality works of art, seem to me to make our getting any of the fine big works we want almost impossible, unless by something of a miracle.’⁸³ Hall’s response to this was to reaffirm his rejection of the ‘unique masterpiece’ principle and to press for greater independence in deciding what to add to the collection:

I have never been convinced that there is any class of object utterly essential to the existence of a gallery like this. I believe that a skilful expositor could already

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Letter from Alan Roger, June 1972. GMA A33/1/3/4/3.

teach a vast amount about modern art from the collection that exists. I can view with equanimity a further delay in getting a Braque or a Vlaminck...⁸⁴

Taking for granted that the function of the gallery is to teach about modern art, he argued that this does not require the physical presence of particular masterpieces: the logic of this argument keeps open a role for those galleries that cannot aspire to possess a selection of great masterpieces, as described by Hein (see p. 50). He explained further the way he wished to proceed:

You ask what our policy should be... There is something repugnant about the current madness that makes one unwilling to take part in any further scramble. ... My instinct is to say that the price madness is forcing us to reconsider our own values. Is it really essential for us to join in? Our responsibilities are not to the international junta that determines the price levels. I think the situation calls for still more independence of judgement and perhaps a willingness on the part of the committee to enlarge the scope of what they will consider suitable material for the collection. I believe the Rosso is a very well-timed acquisition on that sort of grounds...⁸⁵

The attitude expressed in this passage recalls the stance suggested by Clark at the inauguration of the Gallery, of making up for a lack of money by using courage and clairvoyance. Hall saw this type of courage as ‘independence of judgement’, showing confidence in one’s own ability to judge works and not simply choosing works by artists whom others have canonised. He demonstrates his independence of judgement by rejecting the pressure of the ‘international junta’, the dealers and museum directors who contribute to the rise of certain artists to positions of extreme prestige and consequent price inflation.

It is interesting to note here that Hall considers the primary purpose of this gallery’s collection ‘to teach about modern art’. His insistence that no work is ‘essential’ reveals surely a broader understanding of art than is sometimes presented in the standard account of the developments of the 20th century. Hall interprets the notion of a collection as a tool for practical use, rather than an abstract ideal whole waiting to be completed. He accepts responsibility for using the material effectively – the value

⁸⁴ Letter from Hall, 21 December 1972. GMA A33/1/3/4/3.

⁸⁵ Ibid. The Rosso referred to is a sculpture by the Italian sculptor, Medardo Rosso, entitled *Ecce Puer*, which Hall had recently purchased in Italy, which Hall rated highly for its emotional impact but which was not on an international list of ‘must-haves’. The acquisition record for this work contains Hall’s account of bringing the work back: ‘I went to Venice to examine it and having felt its weight I bought something resembling an army kit bag and brought it back with me on the plane. The Italian customs man on hearing about it remarked that he too practised sculpture – somehow I cannot imagine a British customs man saying that! Of course one could not do anything like that now – I mean bringing it home in that fashion, but it saved the galleries a packet.’ (SNGMA Registry Files, Rosso, *Ecce Puer*, 1906).

comes from the skill of the expositor, not from the quality of the work on display. By this measure, the justification for selecting only masterpieces has little substance. It seems to prize the artwork principally for its prestige value, favouring its uniqueness. Elsewhere Hall expanded on his doubts about the value of a collection that consisted only of masterpieces: 'It is really quite difficult to envisage a collection of nothing but masterpieces. It would be a prodigy, but I am not sure it would be a working museum'.⁸⁶ He explained that he saw any collection as 'pyramidal', resting on 'a "substratum" of works which are there to provide context, even foil, to the greater works among it and also to be a sort of work of reference to enquirers'.⁸⁷ Masterpieces cannot convey their message without other, less prestigious works to complete the picture: this chimes with Hein's analysis.

Expanding roles

The Gallery's other function as a centre for research and scholarship was also severely hampered by lack of resources. By the summer of 1967, Hall had started 'making an index of contemporary Scottish artists and collecting together the scraps of evidence about them'.⁸⁸ He wanted to create a research database on all Scottish artists. This was the type of duty expected of a national gallery, but Hall could not dedicate as much time as the task required. As noted in the reports on acquisitions, he was increasingly aware that the Gallery was not engaging the public's attention, a situation made more evident by the success of other ventures within the city. As well as collecting and displaying, there is also an expectation that the museum will interpret and explain. Hall felt unable to address this issue satisfactorily without an assistant to whom he could delegate some of the work, but he had to wait until 1973 for such an assistant, and then it was mainly because of the additional duties relating to the intense negotiations about a new site.⁸⁹ David Brown was appointed and started work in August of that year, the first addition to the SNGMA's curatorial team. His arrival marked a key development, as he introduced his own preferences, promoting contemporary artists in particular. He suggested an Agnes Martin exhibition, having

⁸⁶ Letter to Gabrielle Keiller, 25 November 1980. GMA A42/3/10.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Memo to Baxandall, 20 September 1967. GMA A33/1/3/3.

⁸⁹ 'It is impossible for all the aspects of an exhibition to NG standards to be dealt with by the present staff, at a time when other pressures are building up. In particular, it is crystal clear that not enough time has been given to the presentation of the case for a new gallery.' Report to Trustees, Board Room Minutes, July 1972.

seen her work at a group exhibition of Minimalist art at the Royal College of Art in London. Brown later reflected on how pioneering this was: 'At that time there weren't any of her paintings in this country. A few months later the Tate bought a painting, the first Agnes Martin painting to come to Britain. It was the first Agnes Martin exhibition in Britain though it hasn't got into the literature'.⁹⁰ The exhibition prompted a letter from a visitor expressing surprised appreciation, to which Brown replied, 'You should not have been surprised as the function of the SNGMA is to show something of the variety of 20th Art, including that of the 1960s and 70s.'⁹¹ Undoubtedly this function was carried out more easily thanks to the newly-constituted post of Research Assistant. Hall's description of the exhibition indicates what he saw as its purpose: 'The exhibition here will be very small and frankly didactic in purpose, that being to introduce the public here to a way of thinking on art with which they are completely unfamiliar, through the medium of a single, artistic personality'.⁹² This had been the historic vision for the gallery, expanding the horizons of the Scottish public by showing them the latest national and international developments. The educational component was central to Hall's understanding of the purpose of the Gallery, particularly with regard to the more challenging art emerging at the time. He did not see it as his role simply to show these works. He wanted to give the public the means to judge them for themselves.

Brown was also responsible for the Paul Nash and Richard Long exhibitions in 1974, and had prepared the Sol LeWitt and Duncan Grant exhibitions for 1975, but before these opened, he had been recruited to a job at the Tate. This was a move that would be repeated by several of his successors over the next few years, illustrating yet another aspect of the complex relationship Edinburgh had with her London counterpart. On the one hand, it could be regarded as a compliment that a period of training in Edinburgh provided a level of practical expertise that the London organisation appreciated; on the other, it was somewhat disheartening for the Edinburgh institution to acknowledge that it did not yet provide enough opportunities to keep ambitious staff for any length of time. Nevertheless, although Brown had only remained at the SNGMA for about fourteen months, he had made a considerable

⁹⁰ Transcript of interview with Patrick Elliott, in GMA archives. The exhibition was held in March 1974.

⁹¹ Letter dated 19 March 1974. GMA A33/1/2/71.

⁹² GMA A33/1/2/71.

impact during that time, injecting a genuine passion for some of the up-and-coming stars of the future.

There was a concurrent move to extend the Gallery's exhibition season. During the first few years, no exhibitions had been held during the winter months, partly because there was a smaller potential audience outside of the tourist season and partly because opening hours were so limited, having to comply with the Gardens' 3.30pm closing. Hall decided to experiment with specific "Christmas" exhibitions, 'to remind people we are still here'.⁹³ The first of these was **Toys by Artists** in 1972/73, which deliberately targeted family audiences, and combined art and entertainment. This proved very popular with the public, attracting many visitors over a three-week period, and the winter exhibition thus became a regular feature of the annual calendar, allowing the gallery to explore interesting and often eccentric avenues outside its usual parameters. The most successful was the 1975/76 **New and Rediscovered Musical Instruments**, which opened slightly earlier 'to coincide with the last weeks of the school term' and attracted over 5,000 visitors. The idea of this exhibition, combining music and art, and allowing for 'playful' participation, recalls the work done by Stanley Cursiter during the war years when he filled the National Gallery with all kinds of exhibitions intended to broaden the range of visitors to the galleries. It is also an early example of what Nick Prior has analysed in some detail in 'Having One's Tate and Eating It'.⁹⁴ Galleries are flexible structures that can present more than one type of programme for their public, acknowledging that this 'public' is not necessarily unified.

The winter exhibitions evolved into more clearly defined educational ventures, as this came to be seen as an effective way of addressing the difficulty of the restricted space. The information notice for **The Sculptor at Work** exhibition in December 1976 stated: 'The emphasis will be on informing visitors rather than on the display of fine works of art, which however will remain the centre of the Gallery's policy.'⁹⁵ The idea of an exhibition demonstrating the production of art works was also a way of bringing the subject to life in the way Cursiter had intended with his vision for an 'art centre', which in turn had drawn from the ideas of the Bauhaus experiments. It

⁹³ Leaflet promoting winter opening. GMA A33/1/2/62.

⁹⁴ Nick Prior, 'Having One's Tate and Eating It', in Andrew McClellan (ed.), *Art and its Publics* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), pp. 51-74.

⁹⁵ GMA A33/1/2/89.

brought the messy process of artistic production into the frame of the gallery, extending understanding beyond simple reverence for the end product.

Focusing on the educational potential of exhibitions provided a valid justification for limiting the number of works being shown, and this policy was carried through into the rest of the year too. The accompanying leaflet to the small exhibition entitled **Giacometti's Woman with her Throat Cut**, stated, 'The exhibition is a didactic one, aimed at explaining the evolution of the work and the sources and background'.⁹⁶ The limitations of space within Inverleith House were increasingly leading to such small-scale educational exhibitions, intended to help the public to engage with various aspects of twentieth century art through indirect explanations rather than through direct encounters with works. The architectural frame continued to restrict the range and the scale of activities offered.

Nevertheless, major exhibitions were still planned for the summer season. 1978 saw a bold exhibition of Russian art, entitled *Liberated Colour and Form: Russian Non-Objective Art 1915-22*. This was Scotland's first showing of Russian art of the period, and had been co-ordinated by one of the leading Russian scholars, Andrei Nakov. Hall rightly expected to achieve considerable success with it as it presented works that had not been seen before, but it became an inordinately difficult exhibition to control for a number of reasons.⁹⁷ Despite this, Hall was able to write to one of the lenders, '... the consensus of opinion in Edinburgh was that it was one of the most interesting and valuable exhibitions ever mounted there'.⁹⁸

The 1979 exhibition of sculptures by the German sculptor, Wilhelm Lehmbruck, was closer to Hall's preferred criteria. He explained:

I am moved [to hold an exhibition of his sculptures] by my own high opinion of the sculptor, the suitability of his work for the conditions here, the ignorance of the work in this country, and moreover my wish to establish a working contact with the Lehmbruck Museum.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ GMA A33/1/2/107/3.

⁹⁷ There were problems securing loans, having the text of the catalogue ready in time, and arranging transport. The difficulties culminated in the exhibition achieving a level of notoriety not normally associated with the restrained world of the National Galleries, when the Daily Mail reported rather salaciously that the NGS had been subjected to a court injunction prohibiting the Trustees from handing over the paintings at the close of the exhibition. The move was prompted by the start of divorce proceedings by Nakov's wife, and her belief that 'her husband would dispose of the works'. *Daily Mail*, 9 September 1978.

⁹⁸ GMA A33/1/2/99/3.

⁹⁹ Letter from Hall to Dr Killian, 12 May 1978. GMA A33/1/2/108/3.

He considered the possibility of trying to interest a London gallery in showing the same exhibition, but noted, 'London is not, on the whole, interested in showing the classics of modern foreign art'.¹⁰⁰ Again, we see Hall's independent judgment and missionary quality; rather than conforming to standards set elsewhere, he preferred to promote what he considered most valuable. In the Lehmbruck catalogue, he wrote: 'Lehmbruck's beautiful works, classical and expressionist together, should be far better known and this exhibition, partly in the open garden, should provide a unique opportunity.'¹⁰¹ The Botanic frame could also become the perfect setting, not the restricting compromise.



Figure 10: Installation shot of Lehmbruck exhibition

Persistent problems of space and the impact of institutional critique

By 1970 the advantages of the location were clear, and it made sense to investigate the possibility of overcoming the disadvantages, namely the diminutive size and the lack of independent access. Discussions were held with the Botanic authorities, which led to two distinct options being considered. The first was suggested by the then Regius Keeper of the Botanic, Dr Fletcher, who was largely in favour of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ GMA A33/1/2/108/4.

extending the gallery, but felt the easiest way would be to extend along the existing walls of Inverleith House. This solution came to be referred to as the ‘Cluster’ solution, and it contrasted with that favoured by the Trustees of the NGS, which followed more closely the example of the Louisiana Museum in Denmark, and was called the ‘linear’, or ‘Louisiana’ scheme: the advantage of this scheme was that it connected the gallery to the main entrance.¹⁰² It was imperative that the gallery should establish an independent access route if it was ever to be able to offer the full range of services, including evening activities. Without it, it would remain, as the NGS report of 1967 had described, simply a gallery showing twentieth century pictures instead of a functioning museum of modern art.

Plans were commissioned and site studies carried out which clearly recall features of the Louisiana building.¹⁰³ The negotiations continued for several years, looking for ways to satisfy the needs of the GMA whilst not interfering with the functioning of the Gardens. By 1972, there was much enthusiasm for the Louisiana scheme from the Trustees of the NGS and Hall was asked to prepare a report outlining the theoretical requirements for a new GMA as he envisaged it on the Botanic site. Rather than simply preparing an estimate of the hanging space required, Hall undertook a much broader conceptual analysis of the role of a Gallery of Modern Art in Scotland. This analysis deserves to be considered at some length as it identified several of the specific difficulties faced by the SNGMA at that precise historical moment, and suggested an architectural solution that might successfully address them.

The need for such in-depth analysis arose from the profound shifts that were occurring within modern art museums. Over much of the 20th century, but with increased vigour from the 1960s, artists had rejected the museum as an inappropriate context for their work. Institutional critique became a significant part of many artists’ practice, aimed at revealing the inadequacies of the institutional frame. Many museums specialising in modern art were prepared to change their methods and their

¹⁰² ‘It would provide access from an entrance on Arboretum Road and proceed upwards by stepped levels in a single storey linear building designed to link up with Inverleith House in such a way and by such a route as to cause the minimum amount of damage to the Garden.’ Proposed Extension of National Gallery of Modern Art: Notes of Meeting held in Argyle House, 22 September 1970. GMA A33/1/5/1/8/4.

¹⁰³ A memo records the advantages of ‘the special relationship between the interior and exterior, and the possible contrast to be exploited between the static interior of the house and the fluid treatment of the extension.’ Future Development of the Gallery of Modern Art, June 1969. GMA A33/1/5/1/8/4.

attitudes to accommodate these anti-museum trends. Hall was aware of this shift in focus, and wished to confront it in order to decide the best way to proceed with the plans for a new building in Edinburgh.

He began with an assessment of the current situation, recognising his gallery's inherent weakness: 'There are many reasons why the art revolution of the past 12 years has left us unaffected and for that reason seeming to be a bastion of conservatism. I do not for a moment think that we can build a new gallery on that basis'.¹⁰⁴ Despite the distinction of being the first public gallery in Britain dedicated exclusively to modern art, it had not fulfilled its potential for engaging with the more radical aspects of that art: this dilemma had to be addressed.

Hall took as his starting point a recent edition of the official ICOM publication *Museum*, dedicated to the 'problems of the museum of contemporary art in the West', in which leading museum directors reflected on the relationship between architecture and the museum.¹⁰⁵ The writers argued that the architecture of a museum must be determined by the specific functions required of the museum. This in itself was not controversial. Hall took issue, however, with their willingness to alter radically the museum's functions in order to accommodate the new anti-museum art. The article highlights the tension between, on the one hand, the responsibility that rests in an institution with a permanent collection and, on the other, the aspiration of a gallery specialising in modern art to present contemporary works. The directors were exploring possible architectural solutions to the difficulties of display presented by the more radical forms of modern art that were emerging. As these radical art practices rejected the traditional gallery setting, the directors were willing to forego aspects of the gallery in order to ensure that it could contain them. They speculated on how to achieve this:

What external form should this bastion of freedom take? All kinds of improvements and changes can be made in existing buildings. A new museum cannot do without an information department and special areas to stimulate choice, as well as activity areas and a collection. Unfortunately it must also have originals which alone can guarantee the museum visitor's participation in events. But as long as we must exhibit original works to inculcate a new visual perception we cannot break away from the concept of a treasure chamber. We can, however, use the

¹⁰⁴ Report submitted to Board of Trustees, 17 October 1972, entitled 'Problems of evaluation of the future National Gallery of Modern Art', p. 5. GMA A33/1/5/1/8/1.

¹⁰⁵ *Museum*, vol. XXIV, no.1, 1972. The directors were Pierre Gaudibert, Pontus Hulten, Michael Kustow, Jean Leymarie, Francois Mathey, Georges Henri Rivière, Harald Szeemann, Eduard de Wilde (interpretation: Harald Szeemann).

Hall was troubled by the assertion that “unfortunately” a museum must have originals (i.e. works forming the collection), and the negative associations implied by the concept of “a treasure chamber”. He rejected such a negative interpretation: ‘we have a collection and I do not consider it a burden’.¹⁰⁷ He recognised some merit, however, in the suggestions for accommodating the changing needs of the museum within its architectural framework. The writers put forward an elaborate scheme for ‘concentric circles’ to house the activities they envisaged taking place within the museum:

The value of this project is ... above all in its conceptual framework. Opening out the various functions of the museum-as forum, as *agora*, market-place of ideas and visions, meeting-place, making-place, and memory-store - it enables us to see each of these functions as linked...

But in museums where both memory and current activity are combined, it seems essential to think things out in such a way that the habits of conservation and security associated with highly priced treasures of the past are not allowed to infect the open space of the present in an inhibiting way. Politeness, good taste and ‘quality’, however essential, can become traps in themselves: we should not banish provocation, doubt, even disorder from our museums. They are still in many respects one of the last melting-pots and unconditional spaces in our societies.¹⁰⁸

The references to ‘museum as *agora*’ recall Cursiter’s vision for an art centre housing production as well as display and conservation, but the language here reveals a different underlying attitude: to imply that the basic museum functions of conservation and security risk ‘infecting’ the ability to incorporate contemporary works shows clear unease at the responsibility for retaining the permanent collection, in case its ‘good taste and quality’ permeate through and weaken the ability to encompass new trends.

Hall detected an unholy alliance here between the most militant artists and the museums, with museums prepared to abandon their essential function, but he acknowledged that by not adopting the latest trends, his gallery would be perceived as a ‘bastion of conservatism’. Although Hall did not relish this reputation, he felt accountable to the public for whom the gallery exists:

The majority of this public is not yet really reconciled to the subjective appearance of even conventional modern art. Must we wait for a majority to “catch up”? Is the road to understanding the latest contemporary art necessarily

¹⁰⁶ ‘The Problems of the Museum of Contemporary Art’, *Museum*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Problems of evaluation of the future National Gallery of Modern Art’, p. 6. GMA A33/1/5/1/8/1.

¹⁰⁸ ‘The Problems of the Museum of Contemporary Art’, *Museum*, p. 46.

through the earlier phases? No direct answers are possible. The problems of education in art and of national or racial attitudes to art as they affect us in Scotland seem too vast for a single institution to grapple with. The only reasonable conclusion seems to be that in our Scottish society in the foreseeable future this gallery will have to play a dual role – as a conserving museum of 20th century art and as an exhibiting (or functioning, as it might now be put) gallery of contemporary art.¹⁰⁹

This statement offers a stark insight into the essential dilemmas facing any institution charged with the task of collecting and displaying modern art. Is the first responsibility to show the latest art regardless of whether the public will come to see it, or should the gallery continue slowly to educate the public to appreciate the new trends? Can the two be reconciled, or must one take precedence over the other? Such questions were central to any decision about what type of building was required, as the answers defined the institution's function. Certain phrases hint at a sense of despair ('problems... too vast for a single institution to grapple with'), but it should be noted that Hall was at this time still running the gallery single-handedly with only a part time secretary to assist with correspondence. He was not suggesting that the situation could not be resolved, but for the immediate future he could not foresee being able, or even wishing, to alter the essential purpose of the institution. Instead, he believed that the current balance of functions – building up a permanent collection and showing exhibitions of contemporary art - remained the most appropriate arrangement for his institution. The dual role is exactly what the authors of the *Museum* report consider increasingly difficult, but Hall suggests that this could be seen as a failure of nerve or of imagination. 'It would be an important achievement to show that radical art can co-exist in the same premises with earlier modern art. Or not merely co-exist but do it in such a way as to bring out the continuity of the imagination'.¹¹⁰ This brief comment encapsulates Hall's mission as a museum director: he was most interested in tracing a continuous path through the art of the 20th century and before. He preferred to identity the common thread that connected even disparate forms of art rather than highlight the rupture.

The intense self-scrutiny in this report marks a significant moment in the conceptual framework of the SNGMA. At this point, it could have adopted the avant-garde approach being promoted in the more progressive centres; as Hall had noted, the activities organised by Demarco demonstrated that there was a constituency

¹⁰⁹ Problems of evaluation, p. 6.

¹¹⁰ Problems of evaluation, p. 7.

interested in engaging with radical contemporary art. Hall firmly believed, however, that the other responsibilities intrinsic to the national status of the SNGMA required the institution to adopt a less extreme approach. The impact of Institutional Critique on the SNGMA, therefore, was minimal: the gallery ceded little to the avant-garde, even though that left it open to the accusation of conservatism. The analysis of the decision to adopt this policy has shown, however, that the choice was not made because there was an overarching desire to retain this conservative attitude, but because the multiple roles embodied in the single institution prevented it from abandoning one in favour of the other. The gallery was obliged to balance apparently irreconcilable opposites to satisfy as wide an audience as possible.

Hall then proceeded to offer his proposed solution to the seemingly impossible situation. He suggested borrowing one idea from the *Museum* symposium – that of dividing the museum conceptually and architecturally into four concentric circles. The first (outer) zone would contain public services, space for experimental, artist-directed or group work, and a temporary exhibition gallery. The second zone would contain galleries for mid-twentieth century art designed for a museum or public frame, and possibly another exhibition gallery. The third zone would house galleries for so-called ‘classic’ modern art, study galleries and a graphic art gallery. The fourth (innermost) gallery would display works designed for domestic frames, and most Scottish art; this zone would be located within the existing Inverleith House space.

A building composed thus would address several of the fundamental questions always difficult to resolve within the single space of a national gallery of modern art. It offered a working solution to the dilemma of balancing otherwise incompatible requirements. It suggested a way of combining the multiple roles required of the gallery into a unified and coherent whole, while allowing each of the multiple roles to retain its own distinct identity. The report was directed at the specific case of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, but so much of its analysis pertains to the more general type of any GMA, and addressed issues that are still being hotly debated everywhere. The Groninger Museum in the Netherlands is an example of the concept, where a team of architects was invited to design individual parts of a complex structure: ‘the museum was no longer conceived as a universal or unifying

institution of culture but as a collage of different architectural expressions which highlight the diversity of the collections'.¹¹¹

The report concluded by asking whether the Garden site was the most suitable, particularly given the local audience:

It would be an act of faith to offer the full range of services already described to a predominantly Edinburgh public, and winning support for them will be even more difficult on the Garden site. So it must be admitted that the Garden site will tend to water down any tendency to radicalism or activism. But its conspicuous attractions still remain and perhaps grow greater with the steady deterioration of city environments.

If this situation is agreed, size is not the most important condition. More important that whole gallery should be capable of fulfilling this dual role.¹¹²

The importance of location is clear: the Garden site would impose constraints due to the pre-existing identity of the place in the public's imagination, but it would also continue to provide the high public profile deriving from that pre-existing identity. The frame offered by the Garden setting could never be fully flexible: nevertheless, the inevitable compromise was still favourable to the gallery.

Negotiations went beyond a purely local level, as the funding for any expansion would have to be sanctioned by central government. In 1971 Lord Crawford, as Chairman of the Trustees, wrote to the Secretary of State for Scotland to press the case for fair treatment for Scotland:

[The Trustees] are anxious that the necessary building should be given an early place in the next programme of building for the arts. They are strengthened in this view by the fact that the already more than proportionate discrepancy between the areas of Scottish and English national institutions of twentieth-century art is to be further increased by the inclusion in the White Paper of the Burlington Street extension to the Tate Gallery, notwithstanding the fact that London has, in the Hayward Gallery, the central gallery for temporary exhibitions that Edinburgh so conspicuously lacks.¹¹³

The sense of injustice at the lack of funding for art in Scotland recalls that voiced early in the century at the start of the campaign for a SNGMA; the imbalance between support for the Tate and support for the SNGMA has never been redressed.

As discussions continued, however, it became obvious that the Botanic representatives were uneasy about the impact on the Gardens of the favoured

¹¹¹ Michaela Giebelhausen, 'Museum Architecture', in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, p. 235.

¹¹² Problems of evaluation, p. 9.

¹¹³ Letter dated 20 July 1971. ED3/307.

Louisiana scheme, as they felt this would destroy the unity of the Gardens, cutting it in two. A compromise solution of building to the south of Inverleith House was suggested, but this would not have provided the essential independent access, nor the variety of architectural space Hall had suggested.¹¹⁴ The Minutes from March 1973 state that after six years of negotiations, the Trustees had decided ‘with regret to give up the RBG site but to press vigorously for the York Buildings alternative’.

Although this was a major blow, Hall’s analysis was not wasted, simply transferred to the original option of York Buildings – some 40 years after Cursiter had first looked at it. The Trustees immediately re-asserted their claim on the York Buildings site. In August 1973, Hector Munro, the parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Education wrote to Sir William Murrie, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, telling him to spend the next five years planning for the York Buildings site: ‘I can confirm that the Government is willing to make available the York Buildings site for a new NGMA, but it is not possible to allocate a firm place for the project now in the capital programme for museums...’¹¹⁵ Yet another delay was to prevent the gallery from expanding.

The reply from the Trustees indicates their intention to hold out for a high standard of design, even in the face of budgetary constraints:

The Board attach the highest importance to the design of the building, which will occupy a conspicuous place in the centre of Edinburgh and will pose difficult architectural problems in reconciling the needs of a modern gallery with the limitations of the site.¹¹⁶

The ‘architectural problems’ consisted of the restricted size, which would involve laying out the gallery over separate floors, the severe slope and the presence of a former underground railway tunnel, and the lack of any possible car parking facilities. It is interesting to observe the changed attitude to this site; from having long been the most favoured because of its proximity to the city centre, it was now considered an imperfect compromise that would require careful planning to overcome its

¹¹⁴ Minutes of meeting held at St Andrew’s House, 25 January 1973: ‘It did not seem possible to devise an aesthetically satisfactory solution involving a direct extension to Inverleith House... such a building would detract from the atmosphere of that part of the Garden; the accommodation that it offered would barely meet the Trustees’ specification, would result in an over-crowded internal layout, and would present a security problem. It would certainly offer no scope for expansion. Any new construction in the Garden, which was a major national asset, would have to be publicly acceptable...’ GMA A33/1/5/1/8/4.

¹¹⁵ NG5/8/2.

¹¹⁶ NG5/8/2.

shortcomings. Its position as a second-best alternative is emphasised by the statement issued by the Board that ‘irrespective of the move to Queen Street, on completion of the new building, the Trustees intend to maintain a presence in Inverleith House’.¹¹⁷ The affection that had grown up for the Gardens venue was deep and genuine.

Even though the Secretary of State had made clear that no money would be available in the immediate future, the Trustees continued their scrutiny of how to achieve the best solution for a new SNGMA. Hall was again invited to express his reflections on the subject, which he submitted to the Board in September 1973. This document retains the same intense level of self-analysis:

The period of time dealt with by the National Gallery of Modern Art is already three-quarters of a century: a space of time which has seen the most spectacular changes... It must be a major objective of the design to harmonise, reconcile, and bring out the continuity of all types of art to be shown, while at the same time recognising that they do differ very greatly and need different conditions of display. A proposal for dividing the gallery into zones, with these objectives, is included in the brief.¹¹⁸

The description re-states Hall’s vision for the GMA; to include all forms of art, but showing these as all belonging to the same family. The continuing process had allowed Hall to consolidate further his thinking on the need to reveal the continuity within art rather than the rupture. The Inverleith House proposals were adapted to the new context: the zones envisaged as separate pavilions in the Gardens were here re-configured as separate floors, with the fourth, innermost zone which would have been Inverleith House now replaced with the two Georgian townhouses on the corner of Dublin Street – the same two town houses that 40 years earlier, Alan Reiach could so easily have demolished without any planning restrictions!

In 1975, during the enforced wait for funds and space to become available, a delegation visited museums throughout Europe and America.¹¹⁹ The approaching availability of the York Buildings site meant that for the first time since 1940, the construction of a new-built gallery on Queen Street seemed imminent. Given that the

¹¹⁷ ED3/344.

¹¹⁸ ‘Brief for New Building for the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art’, 21 September 1973, General Introduction. GMA A33/1/5/1/8/1.

¹¹⁹ The European tour was restricted to Holland and Germany, and included among others the Van Gogh Museum and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam, the Römisch-Germanische Museum in Cologne and the Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum in Duisburg, while in the USA the tour included the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney in New York, the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse and the Yale University Art Gallery.

drawbacks of this site were now more apparent, the main reason for touring the museums of Europe and North America was to explore ways of coping with the difficulties. The visits brought home to all involved the particular complexity of the task facing the SNGMA.¹²⁰ The multiple expectations placed on the gallery were becoming increasingly difficult to reconcile, yet Hall was determined not to accept a standardised version of a modern art gallery, where the content of the collection was almost secondary, and selected to suit the stylistic requirements of the building. Many museums were prepared to tailor what they showed to fit the strictures of the building that housed them. Even though the collection at the SNGMA was mixed, Hall felt it was important to find a way of including all elements; this was to remain an inclusive collection, not a standardised selected one, no matter how difficult an architectural challenge that might prove. Although clearly the scale was different, it was the example of MoMA in New York that remained most impressive. Hall identified a perfect balance there that mirrored what he hoped to achieve on a smaller scale: ‘MoMA is emphatically a museum, and not an “art centre”, but it is more productive of interest than any normal art centre’.¹²¹ He was equally affected by the low-key architectural statement that the institution made: ‘MoMA shows how little the ultimate success of a museum depends on distinguished architecture... Yet the building has contributed to the success, by its immediate contact with the life of the street’.¹²²

The principal purpose of the tour was to study the range of architectural solutions adopted by different institutions, looking in particular at buildings constructed on restricted city-centre sites. The conclusion painted quite a negative view of the task that faced them back in Edinburgh:

¹²⁰ Hall wrote of the visits: ‘Hardly any of the buildings we saw would have been able to accept a collection as mixed as the one we have built up here. Nearly all have taken as axiomatic that they exist to show main-line American-international art. This goes as much for the new European buildings as for the American ones. It has been a little disconcerting to see how the complete marriage that has been made between the architecture and the contents, is only possible because these conform to a certain type. ... This confirms the importance of the zone concept, unless we wish to decide to conform also, and to produce another international museum of modern art with collections created to suit the building rather than for any other reason. I cannot feel sure that this latter is not what our public wants or needs. Such doubts are part of the general absence of an existing cultural background to our enterprise...’ Report on Visit to Museums in Europe and the USA, p. 18. GMA A33/1/5/1/5/4.

¹²¹ ‘The ambience of MoMA in a vital, busy, exciting part of New York clearly accounts for some of its popularity. The fame of its collections, intensively publicised over several decades, is obviously another reason. A third reason for its success is another achievement which makes MOMA unique – the way it has been able to extend its activities without losing the essential character of a museum as a centre of studies.’ In Report on Museums in Europe and the USA, p. 3.

¹²² Ibid., p. 3.

No museum we saw had been built on such a confined site as York Buildings, and no site used has so little connection with the immediate surroundings. This is almost as severe a limitation on the York Place site as its actual size. All the museums we saw had the appearance ... of prestige buildings of which the community was proud, and which had taken some part in the urbanistic development of the city.¹²³

The final comment highlighted the central problem facing the SNGMA. Although the purpose of the tour had been to study architectural solutions to the awkward site, Hall had come to realise that the wider social problem of establishing a role for the institution was far more important, and that architectural solutions would not necessarily solve this; it had to be addressed at a more fundamental level. All the museums he visited had been built 'to consolidate an already established position in the society that built them'. The situation in Scotland was different, with no strong public interest in the cause of a GMA: 'We do not just have to make a case for the funds, we have to base it on the possibility of activity to satisfy needs that have scarcely been felt in our society. We have to arouse expectations in order to assert the necessity of meeting them'.¹²⁴ This negative assessment of the perceived role of the gallery in the life of the community identifies the disconnection between the public and the GMA. The institution had not yet been able to engage the public with the full complexity of modern art because it did not have sufficient space to allow it to do that, and therefore the public were not yet even aware of what they were lacking. Although Hall remained sceptical of the ability of spectacular architecture to generate genuine engagement with art, he knew that the institution needed more, and better equipped, space to begin to make the kind of impact that would slowly win over a wide audience.

Hall laid out five alternatives that the institution could adopt: i) maintain the status quo, ii) follow a strictly museum approach to expansion, iii) emphasise the educational aspect of the museum, iv) adopt the Art Centre concept, or finally v) become a locally oriented museum. These criteria were not mutually exclusive, and it might be possible and desirable to cover all aspects within the same institution, but the difficulty lay in presenting the case in public:

... it is not a matter of deciding on an ideal museum of modern art, but of trying to see how our own conception of our responsibilities, and our vision for the future, can be presented to Government as a desirable object. And not only to

¹²³ Ibid., p. 18.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

Government but also to the public, assuming that Government will be more willing to sponsor an expansion that seems to have wide support.¹²⁵

This analysis demonstrates how far the project had grown away from that comfortable position it had occupied earlier in the century, when there had been reasonably widespread public support for the proposal. The dilemma was not unique to the SNGMA. In the introduction to *Museum Culture*, Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff state: ‘All of the museum’s strategies of display involve assumptions, often unacknowledged, about the community the museum is addressing, which is not necessarily (and indeed not usually) coterminous with the community it is representing.’¹²⁶ At least in the case of the SNGMA, there was clear understanding that the community it represented was not coterminous with the assumptions made about display, and there was a desire to bring the two closer together.

The York Buildings site was the only one seriously considered that could have offered a city centre location for the GMA. It would have provided a modern purpose-built home for the gallery, and the proximity to the SNPG would have allowed greater sharing of resources. At no stage, however, did Hall see the York Buildings option as the ideal solution. He was never entirely confident that a new building would be constructed according to the high standards seen in Europe and the USA. Before the five-year period was over, however, an entirely new proposal was made which was given greater consideration. This will form the subject for Chapter 3.

Collection building – the debate about ‘typicality’

During the long negotiations about expanding the premises, the process of building up the permanent collection continued. The increased purchase fund had allowed for several important acquisitions, and early predictions that many Scottish works would be acquired through gifts and bequests had proved accurate; the collection now possessed works by most of the important Scottish artists, some key ‘masterpieces’ of classic modern art had been purchased and a range of more recent art was represented.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 22.

¹²⁶ Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff (eds.) *Museum Culture* (London: Routledge; Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. xii.

Progress was hindered by the ever-present problem of space. It was noted in 1981 that ‘the entire exhibition area at Inverleith House was not big enough to show the acquisitions of the nineteen months up to October 1981’.¹²⁷ By now, however, the prospect of new accommodation was within view, and they were able to proceed with major purchases knowing that they should finally be able to show them all. They had a much-improved budget, consisting of £600,000 for the year 1983-84, although they were aware that in future years the allocation might not be so generously weighted in their favour.¹²⁸ During these years, therefore, several important purchases were considered. The correspondence regarding a possible Francis Bacon purchase provides an interesting case-study of the decision-making process. On a visit to London by the Purchasing Committee, they saw a work entitled *Two figures at a window*. Hall was wholly in favour of purchasing this work, but others on the Committee disagreed, focussing on the fact that the particular work was not ‘typical’. Gabrielle Keiller was particularly opposed to the purchase on this point. She wrote:

I feel strongly that it should not be seriously considered. As a painting it is ravishing, but surely, this is not what Bacon is about....
 I imagine there could, in future, be students whose first sight of a Bacon might be at the GMA – what ideas, on seeing this one would they go away with?
 Assuredly not the right one.
 If we acquire works only because they appeal to us personally, we could, I think, be criticised by posterity of having a collection of interesting, but atypical, paintings.¹²⁹

The idea suggested here is that an artist’s work can somehow be condensed into a Platonic essence. The notion that the sight of certain ‘typical’ works will somehow convey the spirit of all his work involves condensing that ‘typicality’ into a set of ‘essential elements’. Only by providing these essential elements will it be appropriate to display a work by the artist concerned. A gallery must try to find a typical work that can act as a synecdoche for the artist’s general oeuvre. The counter-argument to having only those works that are obviously ‘typical’ of an artist’s oeuvre is that one runs the risk of creating a standardised collection, with all Galleries showing the same types of works. Hall was clearly opposed to this narrow interpretation of an artist’s

¹²⁷ NGS Annual report, 1981.

¹²⁸ The Board had already announced they would like to re-consider the ‘catching-up’ principle introduced to allow the GMA to build up its collection.

¹²⁹ Letter from Keiller, 3 February 1983. GMA A42/3/18.

work. He prepared an account of his opinion, recognising that this issue was ‘central to the whole approach to building up a collection’.¹³⁰

He discussed first the concept of ‘typicality’, linking it to how art history deals with the whole career span of an artist, dividing it into ‘good’ periods and less good. Hall noted that artists themselves rarely view their own work in these terms and suggested that ‘they should be applied by museum people with the utmost caution and careful thought, or we become guilty of unforgivable arrogance’. He explained at length his reasoning for recommending the ‘atypical’ work:

The Bacon of 1953 ... was pre-eminently a work of intense feeling – a personal feeling of sadness and existential loneliness, though I think the main point is the genuineness of the feeling rather than its nature... I was also aware of the great material beauty of the painting, which I took as an unexpected bonus ... At the same time the painting was unmistakably pure Bacon – there was no question of its being ‘untypical’ in the sense of being deflected by someone else’s vision. On these grounds the painting seems to me to be worth the highest consideration.

The qualities that Hall identified – the intensity of the emotions expressed and the aesthetic appeal – would seem relevant to the selection process. He acknowledges the counter-argument:

On the other side is to be put the absence of certain recurrent motifs of Bacon, such as the open mouth, the couch, the naked body, the sly suggestion of cruelties or depravities not openly represented. How serious is the absence of those habitual concerns of Bacon?

Any individual who might see this painting in our collection without any knowledge or memory of other Bacon images, would respond to the powerful transmission of feeling ... [they] might realise too that a painter capable of such tenderness is more serious, not less, than one where every single utterance is a howl. So, while I agree that Bacon’s work is ‘about’ jangling the nerves (though I myself prefer not to categorise what an artist’s work is ‘about’) I would still consider that this is in no way contradicted by a major collection showing an unjingly painting.

As presented by Hall, the notion of ‘typicality’ becomes very reductive. In the case of Bacon, the list of features to be included has a shallow, soulless quality, as if a work of emotional intensity is only valid if it also contains some pre-determined repetitious elements. It conveys the impression that the public would only be able to appreciate a work by Bacon if it includes several of the standard set of elements – although if all Galleries adopted the same policy, then people would only ever see one type of work by any given artist. It reduces the unique spirituality of an individual work, and gives

¹³⁰ Report on purchase meeting, 7 February 1983. GMA Committee Meeting, February 1983.

paramount importance to its ‘exemplary’ aspect. Hall reinforces his point by comparing the other works they were shown, of Bacon’s more recent production:

These had in full measure the accustomed signs of Bacon, together with the blazingly assertive monochrome backgrounds of his recent work. Their presence side by side with the 1953 painting was most instructive. In terms of instant visual impact, of course, they flattened it completely. On every ground of feeling and authenticity, quite the reverse happened. I am afraid these late paintings showed all the effects of 30 years of response to pressure – pressure to paint just the ‘typical Bacon’ that some say we should have in Edinburgh.

Hall’s independence of judgement is evident. He is prepared to carry out his own assessment of the merits of individual works, not simply select a work that conforms to a standardised notion of what one artist’s work should comprise. Faced with a choice between a work that contains all the elements deemed ‘typical’ and one which does not, but which instead possesses a more ineffable quality of genuine emotional intensity, Hall has no hesitation in recommending the latter.

He records one final option that was presented to the purchase committee – a large triptych, being offered at \$660,000, ‘an immense sum, far more than we have ever paid before for anything’. He asks:

Can it be justified? Is a triptych intrinsically superior to a single painting? ... Of course on grounds of typicality it cannot be faulted – it is all there, the bare mattress, the writhing metamorphosed bodies, the naked light bulbs (all repeated three times)... To my mind there is too much of status-seeking in museums competing for these objects and neither in scale nor cost is it appropriate for us.

The rejection of the tendency towards ‘status-seeking’ further emphasises Hall’s independence. He was interested in building a genuinely sound collection, not competing with other institutions that seek to enhance their status through having ‘blockbuster’-type works, choosing works for their instant recognition factor more than for their true quality. In recent years there has been much discussion over the demise of the critic and the death of art criticism: these negotiations illustrate the value of an independent critical mind formulating judgements that do not rely on values imposed externally.¹³¹ As a post-script, the Bacon example also demonstrates the difficulty of collecting art: in fact, none of the works seen on the trip were purchased, and the gallery had to wait until 1995 to acquire a work by the artist.

¹³¹ This is discussed by Hal Foster in *Design and Crime* (London: Verso, 2002), Chap. 7, pp. 104-122.

Twentieth anniversary

The gallery celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 1980. A special exhibition was arranged to showcase the highlights of the collection, entitled **20/80**, alluding to the twenty years of the gallery and the eighty of the century so far. The exhibition provided a natural opportunity to reflect on the progress made during the first twenty years. In his introduction to the catalogue, Hall summarised the circumstances that had faced the newly-formed institution, the many competing demands which were placed upon it, and the insufficient resources which had been allocated to enable it to cover all these demands. He explained his approach: ‘... there was genuine necessity for an institution small in size and resources to filter its judgements through time. There was also a perfectly reasonable desire to be independent and not steamrollered...’ The twenty-year anniversary exhibition was no exception to this approach: instead of simply showing the most significant works acquired by the SNGMA, Hall took the opportunity to set out his vision of how modern art should best be displayed in order to assist the non-specialist to appreciate it, which he felt was the essential remit of the gallery. He wrote:

The new arrangement of the collection, undertaken for the 20th anniversary of the Gallery in August 1980, is meant to make the approach to a modern collection easier, as well as showing off in new contexts some of the important works that have been acquired. The works on show ... have been arranged in five traditional subjects, with only one room out of seven devoted to abstraction. We hope in this way to focus attention on the works themselves by showing artists still grappling with basic human themes. It is time that less attention was paid to a thing called “modern art” and more to this often surprising continuity, which will be the lesson of the “post-modern” age into which it is said we are entering.¹³²

Hall’s earlier theoretical statements about showing the continuity of art were put into practice here. Much time and expense had gone into preparing the design features of this exhibition in order to make it as accessible as possible. It offers an intriguing view of how a collection can be arranged for display, anticipating the controversy of Tate Modern’s hanging choices by two decades. An introductory room explained to the visitor why a linear, stylistic chronology is neither the only way nor the best way to approach the subject of modern art. The works were then displayed not chronologically, but grouped in themes (Images of Man, Images of Woman, People, Landscapes, Still Life, and Abstraction), although the colour-coded labelling system

¹³² Douglas Hall, *20/80: The First Twenty Years* (Edinburgh: NGS, 1980), p. 7.

also provided an indication of the period when the work had been created. The exhibition attempted to make modern art more directly accessible, but it aroused much consternation by what was perceived as the excessive popularisation of art. The gallery had commissioned a series of captions from Neville Garden, a local broadcaster with no formal connection to the visual arts. These captions, many of which were comical and deliberately non-academic, were criticised for belittling the art to which they referred.¹³³ Opinions were mixed, with some people appreciating the attempt to demythologise modern art and encourage people to formulate their own responses, but others criticised the method as undermining the value of art. A local artist, Edith Simon, wrote to Hall expressing her appreciation of the exhibition:

It seems to me that all these nasty little voices raised – quite often very misleadingly – against this new departure are in fact trying to preserve a sterile elitism, and nothing more. It isn't so much that you've let the side down – you have let the drawbridge down and demolished an unwritten Keep Out sign.¹³⁴

This expression of praise for Hall's work contains a clue to what lay at the heart of all his efforts at the gallery – to encourage the public to engage with modern art by providing them with opportunities to see a wide selection of what he believed represented the best of it. He aspired to broaden the appeal of modern art without compromising standards; such an aspiration has to find a path between 'elitism' and 'dumbing down', which is a perennially difficult balance.

By the time this exhibition was staged, there were new plans for the future of the institution. During the imposed delay until the Government's next five-year capital funding review, an unexpected opportunity had arisen that commanded the attention of the Trustees and the Keeper, and led eventually to a move into larger premises.

What assessment can be made of the institution's early years? In the twenty years since it opened, it had established itself as a serious gallery capable of mounting interesting exhibitions, often of overlooked artists. It had made a virtue out of its restricted venue by showing works that were enhanced by the setting, although this elegant setting had prevented it from engaging with much recent art. The Keeper acknowledged that lack of space had prevented the institution from providing the

¹³³ The *Sunday Times*, 24 August 1980, reported: 'Beneath Picasso's painting *Mother and Child* are the words: "He always does it, doesn't he? That's a mother and child all right. You've seen them before at the bus stop." And beneath a timeless work by Braque it says: "This is one of those. How many objects can you spot?"'

¹³⁴ Letter to Hall, 24 August 1980. GMA A33/1/2/110/2.

wider range of services to the public that it believed it should. Every effort had been made to expand the premises, but until sufficient funds were made available, there was little more that the gallery itself could do. As a start to the institution, the first twenty years had brought considerable success within the limited parameters imposed by economics, and can be seen as laying the foundations for the imminent expansion.

CHAPTER 3

Belford Road



Figure 11: John Watson's School, Belford Road

John Watson's: a new proposal

In 1976 the former John Watson's School on Belford Road was bought by the Crown Estates: they had received an unexpected windfall from the revenues generated by the discovery of oil in the North Sea, and had used some of the money to save the historic school building. Designed by William Burn in 1825, it is one of several Edinburgh educational institutions of the early nineteenth century built in an austere Greek-revival style. The Crown Estates Commissioners offered to lease the building to the Department of the Environment for use as a gallery. A press release of August 1977 reported that 'The Secretary of State for Scotland has agreed that the Property Services Agency should lease the property from the Commissioners, and that generally it should be for museum and gallery uses'.¹ The same report made it clear that the building might suit the needs of the Modern Art Gallery, although it did not

¹ Scottish Office Press Notice, 24 August 1977. ED3/344.

foresee that institution requiring the whole building: 'it is expected that in due course, use will be made of the remainder by other national institutions for exhibition purposes, including the National Museum of Antiquities and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery'. The fortunes of the GMA and the Museum of Antiquities were still inextricably linked, neither having yet achieved what the original 1930 Royal Commission report had advised.

The Trustees were initially cautious in their consideration of the proposal, and reluctant to let go of the York Buildings option:

The York Buildings site is near the City centre, and has the further advantage of being hard by the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. The possibility of combined planning of the two buildings is of great value. All this would be lost by the adoption of the John Watsons site, and further the Trustees are not happy about this location in itself – they regard it as a somewhat unfrequented area, and one that is ill-served by public transport.²

From this initial lukewarm response, however, the Trustees were gradually won over to the scheme. The visits to museums in Europe and the USA had highlighted the difficulties involved in creating an effective gallery directly on the street on such a restricted site, tempering enthusiasm for a purpose-built modern structure on Queen Street. They argued the case for extending the amount of space to be offered to a proposed GMA within the John Watson's building, and once agreement was reached on this, they accepted the proposal. For the first time, there appeared to be an imminent solution to the problem of finding an adequate home for Scotland's Modern Art Gallery.

In February 1978, Douglas Hall published a letter in *Art Monthly*, defending the decision to opt for this new solution and finally to let go of the York Buildings alternative:

The plan to build a new NGMA [at York Buildings] never came near to being an irrevocable commitment. It is easy to wring one's hands and blame national poverty or loss of nerve, but ... [The John Watsons proposal] is a known quantity instead of a design opportunity – but opportunities are often muffed. It has a hard, well-proportioned functionalism common to neo-classical design which enforces realism, but the scope for conversion is actually immense. The major thing wrong with John Watsons, everybody would agree, is that it is not central. But even this is not without compensations. It is a fine open site with no problems of car parking and great possibility for landscaping and positioning of works in the open air.³

² Memorandum by the Board of Trustees, 'Proposed Use of John Watson's School Building for the National Gallery of Modern Art', March 1976. GMA A33/1/5/1/8/1.

³ *Art Monthly*, February 1978, no. 14, p. 20.

This brief statement explains well why Hall had so few regrets at abandoning what had been the intended home for the GMA for the previous forty-five years. In the first place, the advantage for the gallery of a park setting had become evident during the time spent in the Botanic, and Hall hoped to replicate the experience at the John Watson's site.⁴ Secondly, the study tour around Europe and the States had shown how difficult it could be to produce an efficient building set directly onto the street within a restricted city block. There was the lost opportunity of creating a purpose-built museum, but Hall was not interested in commissioning a distinctive building; at one stage during the USA tour, he wrote: 'one grows tired of the unrelenting grandiosity of new buildings in USA'.⁵ There was also no guarantee of the quality of any new building they might be assigned. Contrary to the Trustees' requests, the authorities had not agreed to appoint a private architect, but intended using a government-employed one. Given the dire financial situation, there would be little opportunity for interesting design, and given the awkward site, a bad design could result in an unsatisfactory building that did not solve the institution's problems.

The new alternative involved many compromises, with the out-of-centre location recognised as the most significant. However, the York Buildings site was also viewed with some reservations because the area had become increasingly dominated by business, as had been predicted back in 1963 when the University site was offered. Although there was no unqualified enthusiasm for the John Watson's option, any compromise offering the potential for expansion must have seemed welcome after two decades of existence in cramped conditions that impeded all growth. It also seemed a more concrete proposal than the York Buildings scheme: there was still no guarantee that after the latest delay of five years, progress would be possible there. A user requirement study group was formed to determine how best to proceed with the conversion, and by 1978 work began. It was estimated that the conversion would take about 18 months, although the discovery of widespread dry rot hampered progress for a while.⁶

⁴ Letter to Mr Kwiatowski, 7 June 1983: 'The twelve acres of open space at John Watson's is a unique asset and is in fact the greatest asset to be put in the balance against the undoubted disadvantage of our distance from the city centre.' GMA A33/1/5/1/9/18.

⁵ Letter to John Russell dated 10 November 1975. GMA A33/1/5/1/5/2.

⁶ John Watson's School Development. ED3/344.

‘the limbo of pious hopes and meaningless assurances’

In fact, progress was not straightforward. In February 1979, the government commissioned a report into the general situation of museums in Scotland, under the chairmanship of Dr Alwyn Williams. This committee began questioning the best use of the John Watson’s building, and assessing the needs of all the Edinburgh institutions that required more space: the SNPG, the NMAS and the SNGMA. At a meeting in January 1980, committee member John Richards expressed his concerns:

... his visit to John Watson’s had convinced him that the building, with its very formal and disciplined architecture and ordered spaces, was far from ideally suited to a Gallery of Modern Art, which had to be able to accommodate the freedom and vitality of 20th century art.⁷

Others shared the worry that the austere Classical architecture of the John Watson’s building was inappropriate for modern art. At the time, there had not yet been many conversions of old buildings into modern art galleries. There was an expectation that modern art should be housed in a modern building, such as the Pompidou Centre in Paris, which had attracted great publicity when it opened in 1977. Richards’ comment suggested that the freedom of expression that had developed in twentieth century art needed an equally unconstrained architectural container. The logical consequence of this would be a building that somehow ‘reflected’ the art, as had been the case at several of the museums visited on the tour. Hall had never been convinced of this. ‘In my view it is wrong to try to mirror the content (or supposed content) outwardly in the form of the buildings. It can only seem to pre-judge the issues and result in compromises and misunderstandings.’⁸ He saw no insuperable conflict between a Classical exterior and modern art.

The setback, however, stemmed not only from John Watson’s possible unsuitability for modern art. The committee was faced with the broader question of how best to house all the institutions needing more space. Richards put forward a strong case for giving priority to the NMAS. Undoubtedly this establishment had been sorely neglected over the years. The first report of the Royal Commission in 1930 had recommended a new building for it, yet nothing had so far materialised. The GMA, on the other hand, ‘was already housed in a pleasant building, which offered some

⁷ Minutes of Committee meeting, 25 January 1980. Acc 8070/1.

⁸ Report entitled ‘Problems of evaluation of the future National Gallery of Modern Art’, p. 9. GMA A33/1/5/1/8/1

development potential on site'.⁹ He proposed re-opening the long-abandoned scheme to extend Inverleith House for the GMA, and locating the NMAS in John Watson's.

Hall replied to these unexpected interruptions with a degree of resigned pragmatism. He set out his reactions to the interim report:

The re-opening of the issue of John Watson's and the location of the GMA by the Williams Committee raises once more all the old questions to which successive administrations of the NGS have found no answers... I do not doubt that a well-designed quite small extension to Inverleith House could greatly intensify this beauty. That would have to be in the future our main claim to fame and reputation as a gallery.¹⁰

He continued, expressing more clearly his private response to the proposals:

The prospect of losing the promise of development of any kind is gravely depressing (not to say almost a personal tragedy for the Keeper who hopes for some sort of metamorphosis before he goes.)
If the Trustees are alarmed at the implications, they would do better to stand firm on John Watson's, and have nothing to do with a revival of the Inverleith scheme.

Such an impassioned response recalls similar outbursts by Cursiter in his attempts to garner support in the face of bureaucratic indifference. The underlying message here is that Hall viewed the John Watson's proposal as offering most potential for developing the institution in the direction he believed appropriate. The initial reluctance about the site had dissipated, and Hall, who had participated in the earlier discussions about the Inverleith House options, knew the severe limitations of that location. A small *bijou* gallery in the Botanic Gardens would continue to attract attention, but not function as the fully operational national gallery that the title suggested. In a later statement by Hall to the Committee, he made clear his anxiety at being refused the John Watson's site: 'Deprived of John Watson's, we shall again be in the limbo of pious hopes and meaningless assurances that have surrounded the history of the Gallery since 1951, or indeed since 1934'.¹¹

Hall was keenly aware that the character of the institution he headed would be determined by the space it was given, and aware that there would always be compromises. As ever, the debates about the building and its location could not be separated from the debate about the purpose of the gallery. Hall summarised these:

⁹ Minutes, 25 January 1980. Acc 8070/1.

¹⁰ Memorandum from Director re Williams Committee Proposals, attached to Board Room Minutes, July 1980.

¹¹ Report by Hall, 'Future status and location of SNGMA', 12 January 1981. Acc 8070/9.

The main difference in emphasis is between the whole museum of modern art, holding historical, collecting and conserving functions in balance with exhibiting, promotional and even polemical functions mainly concerned with contemporary art; and on the other hand a more limited operation in reduced premises which would inevitably stress the historical aspect and possibly lose the promotional or polemical aspect altogether.¹²

The statement expresses the wide-ranging ambition that the institution had always held as its ultimate goal, but which it had so far been impeded from attaining by the constraints of the space. It had never reduced those ambitions, even though they had not yet been realised. To give in now to the suggested compromise would signify a renunciation of the original aims. Hall's analysis emphasises how the size of the building affects the roles the gallery can perform. If the gallery were forced to remain in a restricted space, it would be necessary to re-define its function, curtailing the aspiration to perform many of the activities that would make it a valuable part of the country's cultural life. Although it had not yet had the opportunity to provide these activities, it had always held on to the prospect of that broader role. Hall was not willing to renounce the long-agreed goal without this renunciation being fully acknowledged and openly debated at all levels.

After a long hiatus for the debates around the Williams Committee proposals, the question was finally resolved not by reaching common consent that the GMA deserved it more, but by the NMA's refusal to accept the John Watson's site unless an extension were built immediately.¹³ As the government was not prepared to finance an extension at that moment, the GMA was given the building by default. The GMA was thus granted full use of the John Watson's building while the NMA was promised a new building at an unspecified time in the future. Ironically, during the wait for this (they eventually moved into the newly-named Museum of Scotland on Chambers Street in 1998), they were given temporary accommodation in the elusive York Buildings! The Williams report finally settled the fate of the two institutions that since the first report of the Royal Commission in 1930 had been linked by the need to find a home.

During the uncertainty over its eventual purpose, work at John Watson's had continued only on the core areas that could have been used by either institution. The specific requirements of a conversion to a modern art gallery were not given

¹² Ibid.

¹³ This decision was reported at the Committee Meeting of 30 April 1981. Acc. 8070/1.

particular attention until late in the process. The conversion was carried out by the Property Services Agency, but Hall argued that a firm of private architects should be consulted over the detailing. He did not want the conversion scheme to be carried out without due regard to quality simply because of the turn of events:

The delays have not been of our making, and since they have occurred it is inequitable that we should be penalised for their inevitable consequences. It would be a disgrace to produce a mean and botched-up job which would rightly make us all a laughing stock and would indeed be a pathetic and derisory Scottish counterpart to the huge sums being expended on the Tate Gallery.¹⁴

The comparison with the Tate refers to the major north-east extension that was built on the Millbank site in 1979, and provides another example of the different treatment of the two institutions.

The Edinburgh-based architectural practise RMJM was consulted in time to allow certain design features to be incorporated. The notes prepared for the Design Consultants, while acknowledging the severe financial limitations on the project, indicate an aspiration to include some interesting features that would distinguish the building as a modern art gallery:

Without snatching at the license implied in the term “post-modernism”, we can surely bear in mind that modernism is already a matter of history and that there is no longer a single ‘appropriate’ environment for the display of 20th century art. While most of the building, because of its function and its history, will doubtless have to be bland, it may be permitted to strike a note of piercing, aggressive contemporaneity here and there.¹⁵

The idea of interrupting the overall blandness with notes of ‘aggressive contemporaneity’ indicates a view of the architectural programme as decidedly subservient to the artistic one. The ‘blandness’ is accepted as necessary to the function of the building, displaying art. It is not a negative quality. Such a vision for a gallery fits the quintessential ‘white cube’ aesthetic, which aimed to provide a neutral backdrop that would not interfere with the art. However much this neutrality has been disputed, the suggestion here is that a bland backdrop offers an adequate setting for modern art.¹⁶ Hall was of the opinion that the art should always be central, an idea given voice more recently by Roberta Smith: ‘Buildings don’t make museums; art and only art does’.¹⁷ In fact, the only areas of the former school that were radically

¹⁴ Memo on pre-tender estimates, 26 July 1982. GMA A33/1/5/1/9/4.

¹⁵ GMA Committee Minutes, January 1983.

¹⁶ Brian O’Doherty in *Inside the White Cube*, and Carol Duncan in *Civilizing Rituals*.

¹⁷ Roberta Smith, ‘Memo to Art Museums: Don’t Give Up on the Art’, *New York Times*, 3 Dec 2000, quoted in McClellan, p. 55.

changed were the main public staircase and the doors. These elements belong stylistically to the 1980s and are the only architectural features that make the visitor aware of being in a modern space. The layout of the rest of the interior was not radically altered from its former school design. There was a corridor to the left and right of the entrance, off which were a series of small rooms. The sequence of rooms to the rear of the building were all linked to produce an *enfilade* that stretched the length of the building, allowing an uninterrupted vista that could be exploited in the art displays.

One detail that altered during the long wait imposed by the Williams' Committee was the Trustees' attitude towards the name of the building. In the early discussions, they reported:

We would like to see the name 'John Watson's' retained in the title of the new Gallery, and the title to be shorter than the present one. Suggestions include:

John Watson's Gallery

John Watson's Art Museum

John Watson's Museum of Art

Recent usage in most countries has favoured the word 'museum' in preference to 'gallery'. The term 'modern art' is somewhat discredited and progressively less accurate. We think it should be dropped.¹⁸

The comment that the term 'modern art' is discredited recalls the SMAA, who also debated changing their name because of the negative associations of 'modern art'.¹⁹

The attitude may partly explain the difficult task facing Directors: if the Trustees who regulate the activities of the institution are not entirely comfortable with its definition in the title, it suggests some disparity of vision. When the move was imminent, however, no further discussion took place, and the gallery maintained its title of SNGMA.

The work was finally completed by the beginning of July 1984 (although there were still workmen on site while the works were being delivered for the inaugural exhibition). Almost a quarter of a century after the opening ceremony in the supposedly 'temporary' solution of Inverleith House, the GMA could begin its second phase, inaugurating the new premises with the appropriately entitled **Creation** exhibition.

¹⁸ 'Preamble to Final Report of User Requirement Study', p. 25. ED3/344.

¹⁹ The proposal to change the name of the Association was rejected on the basis that: 'it was not their fault that people got the wrong impression of what the word "modern" meant.' SMAA Annual Report, 1949.

The review in the *Guardian* was full of praise for the new venue, comparing it favourably to Inverleith House:

What I remember most clearly about the old Scottish Museum of Modern Art is that its atmospheres were imperishably domestic. However many impressive Miró exhibitions they mounted, however fine their collection of German Expressionists, you couldn't rid yourself of the feeling that the cosmic ambitions of modern art were out of place in this simple house.

As long and low as a Palladian villa, the new SMOMA building relaxes in several acres of lawn and parkland... Unlike its predecessor, which felt like a vicarage, this former school has gloriously survived its transformation into a palace of art.²⁰

Such enthusiasm was not universal. Clare Henry in the *Glasgow Herald* focussed on the relative inaccessibility:

You have to make a conscious decision to visit the new gallery – no strolling in the Botanics and we'll-just-pop-in passing trade. Worse, the building's institutional façade is rather off-putting and awe-inspiring.²¹

The different opinions demonstrate the impossibility of universal approval; what for one person is a glorious transformation into a palace of art for another remains an off-putting institutional façade. Both assessments were accurate. The transformation of the interior into a space for art display was successful, particularly in comparison with Inverleith House, and the 'cosmic ambitions of modern art' were well presented in the opening **Creation** exhibition. The austere façade, however, with its monumental Doric columns and deep, pedimented portico, did not present a welcoming prospect. Set back from the road, up a long driveway, the architecture did not encourage a casual visit. It was noted with some irony that of the three buildings housing the National Galleries of Scotland, that of the new Gallery of Modern Art was in fact the oldest.²² Clearly the institution would have to work hard to overcome this drawback, to communicate that the content was different to the container, and that the apparent austerity of the architectural frame did not reflect the institution's engagement with modern art.

The location was its most difficult aspect. Belford Road is situated not far from the centre of Edinburgh, but in an exclusively residential area. Around it are some of Edinburgh's grand Victorian houses, with large gardens separating them from each

²⁰ Waldemar Januszczak, 'The very model of creation', *Guardian*, 15 August 1984.

²¹ *Glasgow Herald*, 11 August 1984.

²² The National Gallery was completed in 1859, the Portrait Gallery in 1895, while the John Watson building was first opened in 1829.

other. The area can best be described as a quintessential leafy suburb; very attractive and verdant, but whose charm derives from its quiet tranquillity, not its vibrant modernity. Hall and his staff - increased to three in recognition of the expanded role the gallery would now be expected to play – were well aware of the need to overcome possible public reluctance to travel to the new destination, but were delighted at the level of interest shown following the opening ceremony. Over 40,000 visitors came in the first six weeks.

Hall's speech at the opening lunch revealed a lingering awareness of the risk in moving to this location, coupled with an optimism that the beauty of the site would prove a valuable asset:

The public, and posterity, will show whether it was right to give up the possible convenience of a city centre site some time in the future in favour of this great classical building in its leafy sequestered surroundings. But who, today, would say that we were wrong to grasp with both hands the opportunity we were given to transform the sad hulk of this great building into the work of art it is today. I hold firmly the view that the museum and all it embraces must itself be a greater work of art than any single exhibit in it. Here we have the opportunity to put this principle into practice not only for the building but for the whole of the beautiful and romantic site on which we stand.²³

The description of the museum emphasises the whole over the parts: no single masterpiece, either of art or of architecture, should dominate.

The opening exhibition was generally hailed as a great success, but the planning and preparation had not been a straightforward process. Many issues relating to display came to the fore during the preparations, including how major exhibitions should be constructed, how they should be financed, and the need to react to changing circumstances during the preparations. Given the long and tortuous negotiations regarding the move to the John Watson's site, it was perhaps inevitable that the question of how to inaugurate the new premises would be fraught. The intense level of scrutiny of the inaugural exhibition provides important insights into the role of exhibitions and their interaction with the institution more generally.

As had occurred so often in the past, the historic moment was not favourable to the venture. One correspondent wrote to Hall on hearing of the gallery's proposed opening; 'While ambition shrinks in most of the world and people avoid thinking of

²³ Typescript of speech for opening lunch. GMA A33/1/2/127.

Orwell's 1984, Scotland pushes forward with optimism and large ideas'.²⁴ Hall himself, however, was less confident. A combination of factors, but primarily the prevailing political and economic climate and the general reduction in arts funding, meant that the inauguration of the new gallery looked likely to take place with less of a fanfare than those within the institution believed it deserved. A comment made in 1983 highlights the difficulty:

... there are many other expenses connected with the move and our consequent expansion, from the conversion of subsidiary buildings through the organisation of a prestigious and expensive opening loan exhibition and catalogue.... At one time, we could have looked with some confidence to Government, having conceded the necessity for the building, to meet other attendant costs. This is certainly not the case today.²⁵

There was general agreement that the opening of the new premises needed to be marked in some conspicuous way, but not about how this should be done. It was evident that in many respects it was a complete re-launch of the gallery, as if it were starting again from (almost) the beginning, but the contrast in levels of ambition for this re-launch with the very restrained arrangements twenty four years previously is an indication of how much the organization had grown, even in its cramped environment at Inverleith House. The gallery that was about to open now was a fully formed institution, with a carefully fostered reputation for small-scaled, but generally high quality exhibitions and with a creditable collection of important works. Some Trustees felt that it was the ideal opportunity to show off the works in the permanent collection for which there had not been sufficient space in Inverleith House: the reason for moving was after all directly linked to the need for more space for the permanent collection. Others, however, argued that the re-launching of the gallery needed to make a stronger impact than could be achieved simply with the gallery's own collection. Hall later recorded the background to this choice in a memo to Colin Thompson, then Director of the NGS:

The advantages of opening with an exhibition or with the permanent collection have always seemed to me very evenly balanced. The question has been debated in Committee and the Board on several occasions over the last two and a half years. Your opinion was that to open with nothing but the permanent collection was to risk public indifference.²⁶

²⁴ Letter from Kenneth Lindsay of the New York State University of Binghamton, 7 September 1982. GMA A33/1/2/127/52.

²⁵ Letter to David Donald at Robert Fleming Holdings Ltd., 1 August 1983. GMA A33/1/2/130/13.

²⁶ Memo to Thompson, 5 December 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/64.

It seems incongruous to suggest that a display of the permanent collection would have little to engage the public's attention; after all, that was the main reason for moving into larger premises. It might appear to indicate a failure to have built up an adequate collection over its first twenty four years, but in fact this was not the case, as the policy of purchasing only the best available works meant that although the collection was still relatively small (384 paintings, 72 sculptures, 47 permanently framed drawings and some permanently framed prints as at September 1982), it contained many fine examples by important twentieth century artists, covering a wide range of styles and periods. The **20/80** exhibition had made creative use of the works owned by the gallery, and many works had been added to the collection in anticipation of the move, but this was still held to be not sufficiently attention-grabbing.

Instead it points to the increasing prestige of temporary exhibitions in the museum world; there was growing awareness that retaining public interest and generating wider audiences required a changing programme of events, not just a permanent collection. Several important museums had recently re-opened after major restructuring or extensions (for example, MoMA in New York and the Pompidou in Paris), and they had all celebrated with a major loan exhibition. The era of the blockbuster exhibition meant that any gallery aspiring to international recognition had to compete for attention. The Edinburgh institution did not wish to seem less ambitious. The final decision therefore was in favour of an inaugural exhibition, and the planning process began.

The discussions about the architectural choices had already made the gallery think about its role within the community. The negotiations for the inaugural exhibition reveal more about how the institution believed it should operate within that community and beyond. Hall proposed an idea he had had for some years, which he had been waiting for an opportunity to realise. **The Natural History of Modern Art**, the early provisional title, was conceived as a wide-ranging examination of how artists in the twentieth century had portrayed the natural world. The range of the proposed exhibition was so vast that it could easily have encompassed all of the century's major artistic developments, thereby presenting a condensed introduction to modern art in general. Hall felt the opening of the new premises presented the ideal opportunity. He wrote to a colleague: 'I coined the title a good many years ago but it

was not until recently, when we were assured of being able to leave our present tiny building for a somewhat bigger one in August 1984, that I was able to revive the idea'.²⁷ In a letter requesting a loan, Hall explained how important he considered the exhibition:

I would like to emphasise the unique importance of this exhibition in the life of our museum. After some twenty years in our present cramped, if beautiful, building, we will at last be able to mount exhibitions of some size and importance. **Creation** will be our bench-mark, so to speak, against which all our subsequent exhibitions will be measured. We are therefore very concerned that it should be memorable and of a very high standard. To this end we have been at great pain to secure the loan of top quality works covering a wide range of twentieth century art. We have already been promised major works by Picasso, Miro, Ernst. Klee, Nolde, Ensor, Soutine, Schwitters, de Stael, Bacon and Barnett Newman.²⁸

The list of names indicates the scope; the exhibition would bring together many strands of the twentieth century's complex, and often seemingly disparate, artistic trends. Hall wanted to seize the opportunity of an inaugural exhibition to set a higher standard for the expanded gallery. This exhibition was to be a benchmark for the gallery's future programme, a way of announcing to the local and international audience that the gallery would now be able to provide a broader experience of all that modern art had to offer. The wide scope mirrored the gallery's mission to provide an overview of the century's most important developments, and could also, therefore, serve as an introduction to the content of the gallery's permanent collection.

As preparations began, however, it became clear that the severe financial constraints were threatening to thwart this long-held ambition. Hall wrote to Thompson:

We are in an unprecedented situation, and one which I cannot observe generally without an element of tragic irony. Who could have thought a few years ago that we would be going into this long-awaited new situation without any proper back-up and with the public funding of one of our most basic activities called into question? The main thing that stands between us and a 1930s-like situation is the existence of these substantial purchase grants which please God may continue for a year or two yet.²⁹

The sense of tragic irony was not misplaced. Hall had always hoped to put on an important pioneering exhibition at the SNGMA. He finally had the prospect of doing so, and thus establishing the gallery's reputation, only to be confronted with financial

²⁷ Letter to Kirk Varnedoe, 11 February 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/16.

²⁸ Letter to Rijksmuseum, 23 February 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/41.

²⁹ Report on Creation Exhibition, 2 September 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/45.

restrictions that might prevent the realisation of this long-held ambition. The question arises of how an institution decides where to situate itself in relation to the wider field. Should a small institution accept the constraints of its size, or should it strive to extend the range of services? This was the issue facing Hall as he prepared to take the gallery into its new, extended venue. Having fought the proposal to remain in Inverleith House, he now wanted to exploit the potential of the new space. He saw it as the appropriate moment to be more ambitious than had previously been possible. The problem with funding the exhibition became apparent. In a debate that touched on several of the key issues regarding the gallery's identity and purpose, Hall argued that exhibitions had to be central to the expanded gallery's activity, and indeed were as essential to the gallery's success as the quality of the permanent collection itself. This represents a strong contrast to the situation back in 1960, when exhibitions compensated for the lack of a permanent collection.

The projected move raised many broader issues about the management of the Gallery of Modern Art within the overall organisation of the NGS and the funding of its various activities. A series of emergency meetings took place in the autumn of 1983, following the final decision to allow work at John Watson's to proceed after the interruption of the Williams' Committee. Tempers were frayed following the difficult negotiation period, there was much internal squabbling and defensive positioning.³⁰ Central to the negotiations was the dispute over whether it should be admissible to use money from the Purchase Grant to cover the costs of the inaugural exhibition. The general feeling among Trustees was that the grant-in-aid funds had to be used solely for purchasing works of art, and that if they were seen to be using it for other purposes, the assumption might be made that less money was required for acquisitions, leading to future cuts in the level of funding. Hall argued that it was essential in this instance:

Are the whole funds voted to the Trustees for the purpose of running a group of art galleries in the manner that they in their wisdom think fit, or are they given for the more restricted purpose of conserving (or, in the case of the Gallery of Modern Art, more building up) a heritage of objects?

³⁰ Hall concluded one memo highlighting how important the move was for him as a culmination of all his years of dedication to the Gallery: 'I can surely be forgiven for being somewhat 'emotional' about it when it is after all the climax of at least 17 years of coming-and-going and the last thing of consequence I shall do here, certainly.' Confidential Memo, 18 September 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/64.

My feeling is that there is such a thing as a natural and just proportion between the main business of forming a collection and the other activities of an art gallery in the present day.³¹

This addresses the fundamental question of the core function of an art gallery; if all of its resources are directed at acquiring and conserving works, the other activities that might be expected of such an institution become impossible. For a modern art gallery, this is particularly difficult to accept: purchasing examples of important works adds to the reputation of a permanent collection, but ‘permanent’ implies something static and stable. A modern art gallery requires novelty and innovation if it is to remain vibrant, and this can be achieved through temporary exhibitions, which by their nature are ephemeral. The point was later made at a Board meeting that in fact the money spent on activities such as exhibitions goes very much further than that on acquisitions, even though it is short-lived: the difficulty lay in trying to evaluate in financial terms the return on these very different investments. The notion of investing capital in temporary exhibitions contradicts the spirit of a traditional museum, where investment of capital is justified by the acquisition of a tangible object. Hall found it difficult to convince his colleagues of the need to invest in an intangible product, and the discussions continued:

... I have made out my general case in principle for use of the grant-in-aid for other purposes. Although it is the opening of John Watson’s that has brought this debate to the surface, what we are really talking about is the future policy of the Gallery of Modern Art in respect of exhibitions and possibly, to a lesser extent, other things. Why do we have to express the question in emotional terms like raiding or eroding the purchase grants, or “eating the seed corn”? Fundamentally the question for the Trustees is this – do you want the Gallery of Modern Art to be able to put on important exhibitions and if so are you willing to see the purchasing power (of the GMA, not necessarily the NG or PG) somewhat reduced in consequence? If the Trustees were to answer yes to these questions, is it to be supposed that somebody in government is going to say, we do not agree with your conception of the role of the Gallery of Modern Art, and therefore we are going to give you even less than we meant to anyway? ³²

Once again, the argument extends from the specific to the general; the debate addressed the essential character of the institution, its purpose and its method of operating. Hall was also rather astutely returning the responsibility for the decision to the Trustees, insisting that they accept this responsibility openly instead of passively devolving the decision to the government’s funding regulations. In the same memo, Hall concludes that if this decision is upheld and no money released from the

³¹ Memo from Keeper, GMA, ‘Use of purchase grants for other purposes’, 9 January 1984, included in GMA Committee Minutes, 17 January 1984.

³² Memo to Thompson, 5 December 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/64.

purchase fund, then ‘the only practicable thing to do is to cancel the exhibition’. Without a clear commitment from the Trustees to agree about the financial implications of the exhibition, there was no point in pursuing such an ambitious programme.

There may have been an element of brinkmanship in this assertion. Certainly it would have been a tragedy for Hall to have to cancel at this stage, but as he poetically stated: ‘The prospect of death by a thousand cuts ... is even worse than cancellation’.³³ The cancellation option was rejected, but the background of such extreme financial difficulty meant that the exhibition was scrutinised in far more detail than might otherwise have been the case, prompting intense debate about what constituted a ‘good’ exhibition of modern art.³⁴ The negotiations surrounding this exhibition therefore reveal the complex processes that lie behind a modern art exhibition, assessing who the potential audience should be, striking a balance between appealing to a broad section of the public and making a worthwhile contribution to scholarly understanding, how innovative to be, how to meet the costs, and how to solve the immense practical problems in assembling the body of work required.

The writer and curator Bruce Ferguson has said of exhibitions: ‘Exhibitions are publicly sanctioned representations of identity, principally, but not exclusively, of the institutions which present them’. This is a strong claim for exhibitions – that they actually represent the galleries in which they are shown. He continues: ‘They are narratives which use art objects as elements in institutionalized stories that are promoted to an audience’.³⁵ He suggests using the techniques of textual analysis to understand the underlying rhetorical messages that any exhibition is conveying. The drawback to a purely textual analysis of an exhibition, however, is that it cannot take into account the complexity of the surrounding circumstances. As Sharon Macdonald has said: ‘The model does not allow for the investigation of whether there is such a neat fit between production, text and consumption [...] it ignores the often competing agendas involved in exhibitions, the ‘messiness’ of the process itself, and the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Arts funding had been severely cut during the recession of the early 1980s and there was apprehension about demonstrating accountability for the disposal of funds.

³⁵ Bruce W. Ferguson, ‘Exhibition Rhetorics: material sense and utter sense’, in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 175-190 (p. 175).

interpretative agency of visitors'.³⁶ By looking behind the scenes of this particular exhibition and revealing something precisely of the 'messiness' of the process it will be possible to understand more fully how it was created, and what that exposes more generally about the workings of the institution. The scale of ambition for **Creation** makes it an appropriate object of analysis because it can be read, as Ferguson suggests, as a representation of the institution's identity.

Creation: the genesis of an exhibition



Figure 12: Installation shot of 'The Creatures' in **Creation**

The original concept of the exhibition, **The Natural History of Modern Art**, was extremely ambitious. Hall described it to a colleague in its early stages:

This will deal with the way that artists this century have been inspired by natural phenomena and how their work reflects our changing understanding of the world around us. We hope to show the impact of scientific and technological discoveries on art, but also that changing philosophical and moral views about nature have altered the artist's relationship with the natural world.³⁷

The description emphasises the intellectual foundation for the exhibition – it was not conceived as a popular 'crowd-pleaser' so much as a serious contribution to art historical scholarship. As preparations went ahead, Thompson expressed concern that the exhibition as outlined by Hall risked being 'too high-flown and intellectual for the

³⁶ Sharon Macdonald, 'Introduction', in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, ed. by Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), p. 5.

³⁷ Letter to David Thistlewood, 30 May, 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/16.

ordinary visitor'.³⁸ Hall replied that he doubted if an exhibition of modern art could be popular unless devoted to an artist with a household name. Popularity, and the extent to which it should be deemed the determining factor in preparing an exhibition programme is a sensitive issue for museums and galleries, with additional concerns about modern art and its ability to arouse controversy. Well-constructed and challenging exhibitions are likely to improve the gallery's standing among its peers, but these exhibitions will not necessarily engage the general public. This dilemma is often resolved by attempting to provide different levels at which it can be absorbed. Hall clearly had this in mind:

I see the aim of the exhibition as in two parts – to assemble some beautiful and striking images of modern art which we can show by a mixture of analysis, analogy and association to be nature-based; secondly to assemble a certain amount of visual and written material to enable those who are more interested to trace some of the sources and analogies in greater detail.³⁹

The distinction between 'striking images' and more academic material, and the need to incorporate both, was already suggested by Cursiter.⁴⁰ The idea that there are different levels of visitor experience of an exhibition also reflects contemporary thinking. Nick Prior makes this point in his essay, 'Having One's Tate and Eating It', in which he argues that much of the hostility towards more populist events in museums fails to recognise that these events still leave space for major scholarship to take place, and by encouraging museum attendance such events help to justify the museum's continuing existence and therefore allow it to continue its scholarly pursuits.⁴¹

During the discussions about **Creation**, however, the question was posed in terms of who should take precedence if the choice between potential audiences becomes a contest. The exhibition was undoubtedly extremely ambitious in its intellectual scope,

³⁸ 'The Director voiced his reservations about the way the exhibition had evolved, principally his fear that it might be too high-flown and intellectual for the ordinary visitor.' Minutes of meeting, 7 October 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/64.

³⁹ Report on Creation Exhibition, 2 September 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/45.

⁴⁰ In his report for the Standing Commission in 1932, Cursiter recognised the different needs of different collections: 'The ground plan of any Gallery must depend on the collection it is to contain... [One collection] may demand a series of galleries in which the visitor may elect to see only the finest works, while adjoining rooms in each series contain the general collection, or, in further rooms, the detail and related works of each School.' (NGS5/6/1). The same distinction was drawn in American architect, Clarence Stein's scheme for the 'Museum of Tomorrow', which proposed creating separate sections within the same skyscraper building; a section for the general public with only a few selected objects, and a section for the scholar with the entire holdings. See Helen Searing, *New American Art Museums*, Berkeley, Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1982, pp. 47- 49.

⁴¹ Nick Prior, 'Having One's Tate and Eating It', in *Art and its Publics*, ed. by Andrew McClellan (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), pp. 51-74.

seeking to question established criteria for viewing modern art. Hall explained, ‘What we are trying to do is to suggest new ways of looking at works of modern art’.⁴² The idea of a single exhibition having the power to ‘suggest new ways of looking at ... modern art’ implies a strong faith in the gallery’s potential to instruct and to influence how the public interprets modern art. The explanation of the exhibition’s purpose ties in with Martha Ward’s analysis:

As a form, the temporary exhibition typically involved assessing unfamiliar objects in a provisional context. The exhibition form separated the sites of presentation and reception from those of production and often from those of use and ownership as well. It offered instead a unique field for comparative contextualization, one often claiming to make visible for its audience some more consequential or enduring entity than its own provisional nature and limited contents...⁴³

Hall’s ambition was indeed to produce an exhibition that went beyond the limits of a temporary display of objects: the exhibition would have a lasting impact on public perceptions of modern art. In this respect, Hall could be seen as emulating the traditions established at the start of the twentieth century, when modern art exhibitions first made such sweeping claims.⁴⁴ Such a belief remained central to the work carried out by Alfred H. Barr at MoMA in New York.⁴⁵ Hall took on the challenge of suggesting ‘new ways of looking’, thus going beyond the agreed interpretations. In this way, his exhibition would be expanding the canon.

Thompson remained sceptical, however, and suggested ways to make the exhibition ‘more intelligible and more enjoyable and exciting to the non-specialist’, giving this constituency the priority. He defined what he saw as the main objective with regard to this non-specialist:

[that] ... he or she will come with curiosity about modern art, and very likely with suspicion that it is all rubbish, and we hope will go away with an impression that there is much more to it, that it can now and then be not only enjoyable but illuminating, and that it is not after all simply pulling your leg.⁴⁶

⁴² Memo to Thompson, 13 September 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/64.

⁴³ Martha Ward, ‘History of Modern Art Exhibitions’, in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Fergusson and Sandy Nairne (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996), p. 456.

⁴⁴ Ward cites the examples of the Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne in 1912, the Post-Impressionism shows in London in 1910 and 1912, and the Armory Show in New York and Chicago in 1913.

⁴⁵ ‘History of Modern Art Exhibitions’, p. 459.

⁴⁶ His exhibition of 1936, **Cubism and Abstract Art**, with its famous flowchart explaining the evolution of modern movements, was highly influential in instructing people how to view the most recent art, and in determining what art was considered important enough to belong to the canon.

⁴⁶ Memo from Thompson, 13 September 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/64.

Thompson's ambition for the transformative effects of the exhibition was evidently lower than Hall's.

Hall was attracted to the topic because of its potential to offer an overview of the whole course of twentieth century art. It provoked controversy within the organisation precisely because of the enormity of the challenge it presented. Hall acknowledged that the scope of the exhibition stretched beyond the standard boundaries:

It could not be more different from trying to assemble as many works of a known canon as you can persuade their owners to part with, or illustrating a proven historical sequence or argument. ...
Unlike a 'canonical' exhibition the object of this one is not to get near to completion because there cannot be such a thing. The more work that is done, the more possibilities there seem to be.⁴⁷

As depicted here, the exhibition is like the museum itself: the more it has to show, the more narratives it can relate. The more narratives it can relate, the more suggest themselves. Philip Fisher states: '... each museum is a fragment of one ideal museum. As collections become larger they become more intelligible'.⁴⁸ As Hall colourfully described **Creation**: 'The concept was so Protean, it was like trying to measure a jellyfish'.⁴⁹ Collections, too, have a Protean quality, capable of altering shape as they expand. Both the permanent collection and the temporary exhibition make suggestions about meaning, but the meaning can never be definitively fixed, because they offer infinite possibilities and the addition of new elements will alter any previous definition.

Close analysis of the planning of the exhibition reveals, however, how difficult it is to put together a package of works that tells precisely the story the curator might have in mind. When constructing a narrative framework for an exhibition, a curator must proceed with pragmatism, and be ready to adjust that ideal narrative to fit what will be attainable. Only in the *musée imaginaire* of Malraux is it truly possible to curate the ideal version of an exhibition; reality always forces compromise and adaptation. The same need to accept the constraints of what is possible is equally central to the process of collecting works for a permanent collection. A permanent collection also

⁴⁷ Report on Creation Exhibition, 2 September 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/45.

⁴⁸ Philip Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art: modern American art in a culture of museums*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 23.

⁴⁹ Confidential Memo, 18 September 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/64.

tends to be conceived as a narrative, intended to relate the evolution of art forms from one stage to another. In this, it takes its lead from art history, echoing the interpretation of the artistic developments of the century laid out by the academic discipline.

The **Creation** exhibition illustrates the adjustments required in moving from the concept of an exhibition to its realisation. If a curator wants to illustrate one idea, he will have in mind certain works that can illustrate this idea perfectly. If none of these is available, he is faced with two choices. He can find an inferior substitute to retain the sense of the pre-determined narrative, although this might risk diminishing the overall value of the experience. Alternatively, he can miss out that part of the story, thereby possibly undermining the coherence of the overall narrative structure. A similar dilemma faces directors of universal survey museums. Inevitably there will be gaps in their collections: is it better to tell the ‘story’ of art with sections missing, or should inferior examples that are within reach be accepted? This was the dilemma articulated by Baxandall; Marcoussis or Hayden would have been ‘inferior’ examples of Cubism, although they could have shown some of its properties.⁵⁰ The trend in recent years away from the chronological display previously adopted by the universal survey museums, and reviewed most extensively at Tate Modern, has sometimes been dismissed as a way of disguising gaps in a collection, but by acknowledging the impossibility of presenting a complete story, the attempt to find alternatives marks a positive response. The narrative element will remain a stronger focal point for an exhibition, but it will allow for more adjustments to that initial narrative. In the case of **Creation**, the title changed from the original concept of **A Natural History of Modern Art** to the final version **Creation: Modern Art and Nature**, a shift in emphasis intended to give the curators greater flexibility. In the description of its early incarnation, Hall had explained the vast span the exhibition sought to encompass (see note 39 above), but it was soon apparent that lack of time and resources meant the boundaries would have to be narrowed. Hall described the change in a further letter to Thistlewood:

...In the end we were not able to follow up all the lines of research we had once hoped to do. We just did not have the staff time. We therefore decided to shift the emphasis of the exhibition from art historical enquiry to a broader, synchronous look at the various approaches twentieth century artists have taken to nature.⁵¹

⁵⁰ See discussions in Chapter 2, pp. 49-50.

⁵¹ Letter dated 2 July 1984. GMA A33/1/2/127/16.

Analogously, the SNGMA also had to restrict its ambition to provide a complete history of modern art within its permanent collection, and consequently had to tailor its version of this history to what was available to it. The wide selection of works for **Creation** was intended to reflect the diversity of artistic production over the 20th century. Hall wrote: ‘We have been at pains to spread our net as widely as possible to show many of the different approaches modern artists have taken in dealing with nature...’, acknowledging the need to include many types of artworks to give the exhibition legitimacy.⁵² The same range of styles of art is equally necessary for a gallery of modern art’s permanent collection if it aspires to cover the evolution of important trends. But this diversity presents serious problems for a museum, which also sees its role as helping the public to understand and contextualise artistic developments. At the heart of a museum’s exhibition strategy, either temporary or permanent, there is inevitably a process of simplification of the complex interweaving of directions and influences affecting any given work. There is a need to clarify the narrative underlying the historical developments, but art over the last century has resisted easy categorisation, and therefore presents a challenge to the modern art museum when trying to identify a clear narrative from the disparate strands.

A chronological framework did not give sufficient versatility, so Hall and his main assistant, Keith Hartley, came up with an idea for a ‘poetic’ approach, using the opening words of the Book of Genesis as a structuring device. They described their plan: ‘the exhibition will be arranged thematically and will follow an order which is in part Biblical, part evolutionary, providing an accessible approach which is dramatic rather than scientific’. Despite what today might be regarded as a dubious conflation of evolutionary and biblical, the scheme offered a structure that could comfortably incorporate all styles of art, abstract and figurative, although some of the more recent forms of art closely engaged with nature, such as Land Art, were not included. Strangely, however, Hall was reluctant to include hyper-realism.

We judged that it would be disruptive to include too much obsessive realism or hyper-realism of any sort, as we wish to encourage the OV [ordinary visitor] throughout the show to fall in with the common tendency of modern art towards metamorphism and conceptualising. Introduction of many realist examples might be seen as offering a ‘norm’ from which the others are deviating.⁵³

⁵² Letter dated 24 January 1984. GMA A33/1/2/127/16.

⁵³ Memo dated 4 October 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/64.

Even though traditional chronology has been rejected, there is still a clear trajectory that the curator intends to reveal to, or to hide from, the uninitiated. Here we can begin to detect the type of narrative formation suggested by Ferguson; the curator has the power to eliminate a trend that is awkward for the story he wishes to relate. In fact, the curator acts as ‘creator’, he can control what the public are shown. He can mould the narrative to produce the story he wants the public to view, even at the cost of withholding whole elements of that narrative.

Extending the analysis beyond the temporary exhibition, the broader question arises of what is the best framework for the display of the permanent collection. If an exhibition cannot be adequately constructed using a chronological order, can such a method be any more successful for the permanent collection, given the cross-currents and interweaving elements affecting art at any time? The answer requires an analysis of the purpose of any systematic organising of works, in the manner first proposed in general terms by Michel Foucault and refined with reference to the museum by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill.⁵⁴ Within the museum there have always been two distinct methodologies. The first, didactic, usually equates understanding art to understanding art history. It consists of using the resources of the museum to instruct the visitor, and arranges the display and organisation of the museum’s resources in order to facilitate the visitor’s understanding of a pre-determined ‘story’ agreed upon by experts. The alternative approach seeks to engage the attention of the visitor and thereby produce an emotional reaction, which should provide spiritual enrichment rather than cerebral. Following this method, recognising the connections to and influences from other works would not be seen as contributing to the viewer’s appreciation of the work. Within the SNGMA there had always been a strong tendency towards the didactic; the museum’s *raison d’être* was to instruct the visitor. This, however, begs the question of how and what it instructs. Like so many aspects of the museum’s work, several agendas co-existed, each with a different set of desired outcomes. In the case of the **Creation** exhibition, the broad aim was to engage the general public’s interest rather than specifically instruct them: ‘What is called for is an approach that will elicit surprise, joy, enlightenment, wonder and awe’.⁵⁵ In keeping with this quest to evoke feelings of wonder and enlightenment, the arrangement was described as ‘an

⁵⁴ See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London; New York: Routledge Classics, 2002) and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill’s discussion of this in *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 9-18.

⁵⁵ Draft version of press information leaflet. GMA A33/1/2/127/26.

accessible approach which is dramatic rather than scientific'.⁵⁶ In contrast to the regular methods, therefore, this exhibition was to adopt the museum's alternative function of directly engaging rather than educating. This can be interpreted as a return to the vision for the SNGMA initially introduced by Cursiter, who spoke of art's power to capture the public's imagination.

The approach most often adopted in Galleries of Modern Art is that introduced by Barr at MoMA during the 1930s. This was intended principally to educate, and was perhaps responsible for some of the distancing between the general public and modern art. Bennett suggests that this type of ordering increases the distance between the uninitiated (unlearned) viewer and the art:

.. with the advent of modernism [...] the art gallery space assumes a value in and of itself as that which, in endowing the work of art with an illusion of separateness and autonomy, also then requires spectators capable of responding to it in its own right.⁵⁷

The tendency of museums to arrange the layout of works according to an underlying narrative, which then plays a key role in interpreting any of the works displayed, means that only those who already know the narrative can fully appreciate the works shown:

By the late nineteenth century, in a manner which differentiated them sharply from other types of museum, and continues to do so, the relations between the visible and the invisible in art museums became increasingly self-enclosed as the works on display formed part of a coded form of inter-textuality through which an autonomous world of 'art' was made visible to those who were culturally equipped to see it.⁵⁸

The **Creation** exhibition, however, set out to break down that invisible veil and return to the pre-modernist decontextualization, where works were to be viewed purely on their own merits. This approach has gained further ground recently. John Walsh, former Director of the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, suggests that museums should recognise the importance of the viewer's emotional engagement with art works, and look for ways to facilitate it.⁵⁹ **Creation's** ambition to 'elicit surprise, joy,

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 171.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ John Walsh, 'Pictures, Tears, Lights, and Seats', in *Whose Muse?: art museums and the public trust*, ed. by James Cuno (Princeton: Princeton University Press and Harvard University Art Museums: 2004). He quotes James Elkins, author of *Pictures and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings*, which analyses people's emotional responses to paintings and suggests that the prizing of background knowledge can blunt the emotional response to works of art:

enlightenment, wonder and awe' fitted the trend towards a subjective response to art instead of an academic interest in the historical development of stylistic movements.



Figure 13: Entrance corridor to **Creation**

Even though the display was intended to evoke an emotional response, there was still an underlying educative component to the exhibition, but recast in a popular mode:

To celebrate the opening of the new gallery we decided to mount a major exhibition that would attract not only those who are already interested in modern art, but those who have up to now always thought of it (if at all) as difficult and not for them. We decided that the exhibition would have to be about something that everyone knew and cared about deeply. At the same time it should go right to the root of what modern art is all about. A tall order? It seemed so, until we realised that in the final analysis both the man in the street and the artist are intensely interested in nature, in life itself. If we could tap the same source that made the BBC television's series Life on Earth so popular, we felt that we might find a way into modern art for a much wider public.⁶⁰

This statement of purpose highlights what is the essential difficulty with modern art; the general public's perception that it is 'not for them'. The comparison with a

'Some of what I learned did enrich my experience and show new meanings. But its cumulative effect, historical knowledge, undermines passion.' p. 85.

⁶⁰ Final prospectus sent out with letters requesting loans: the David Attenborough series, Life on Earth, was first shown in 1979 to great popular acclaim. GMA A33/1/2/127/52.

popular television series seems a useful one to indicate where the GMA would like to position itself – as a trusted, paternalistic source of education and entertainment, ‘infotainment’ in contemporary jargon. For purists this position is viewed with suspicion, leading inevitably to a diminishing standard of museological rigour, the ‘dumbing down’ of the museum experience. On the other hand, if the museum considers its role to engage the widest range of audience, then it can be argued that it must adopt a popularising approach. The reality lies more in questions of pragmatic necessity than of overarching commitment to one theoretical position.

An important element sometimes overlooked in assessing either a gallery or a particular exhibition such as **Creation** is how much depends on contingencies. Although stability and permanence are qualities often associated with museums and galleries, the reality within these institutions is often less stable. They are constantly revising their management strategies, and questioning how best to display their collections, and change sometimes occurs at quite short notice. An exhibition of the scale of **Creation** might be expected to involve years of careful planning, and to an extent this was the case. During phases of that process, however, all kinds of difficulties intervened to divert attention and prevent a full commitment to the task. In particular, the major conflicts raised by the Williams’ Committee held up all definite projections by at least eight months, and there was therefore a clear possibility that the gallery might not be ready to open in the summer of 1984. Hall therefore had to work on the assumption that, if necessary, the exhibition could be shown instead at the Inverleith House venue. Until work at the new gallery reached a stage that guaranteed the venue would be ready to open that summer, Hall could not request all the loans that would make the exhibition complete. Many requests were not issued until the spring of 1984, and accordingly, several works that might have added to the show’s narrative were not available.

The process of requesting loans started badly when the only work actually entitled *The Beginning of the World*, a Brancusi sculpture owned by the Centre Pompidou in Paris was not made available.⁶¹ The correspondence with the Stedelijk Museum illustrates a common problem in loan negotiations. The Director replied to Hall’s

⁶¹ Brancusi in fact proved to be quite an unlucky artist for the exhibition, as another request for a work of his, *A Fish*, a sculpture at the Boston Museum of Fine Art, could not be granted because: ‘I deeply regret having to tell you that the beautiful Brancusi you wished to borrow has been destroyed by a thief who believed the piece to have been made of precious metal and who tried to melt it down.’ Letter from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, dated 5 December 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/54.

request: 'We noticed that the framework of this exhibition has a mainly educational character. Now you asked us for the loan of Jackson Pollock's *Reflection of the Big Dipper*. We are very sorry to inform you that ... we cannot lend you our Pollock, because works of this importance are only being lent to one-man shows...' ⁶²

Thematic exhibitions are notoriously the most difficult for which to obtain loans. They do not privilege the individual artist, and therefore they do not necessarily promote the works in a way that the lending galleries prefer. It indicates a reluctance to cede control of the response to the work in the collection. Interestingly, the interpretation of the exhibition's function by another museum was 'mainly educational'; in the loan requests, this was highlighted over the concept of drama. Even within the SNGMA's correspondence, the exhibition had many forms.

Despite all the difficulties in the early planning stages, the exhibition finally took shape. The shift in emphasis from the original **History of Modern Art** to **Creation: Modern art and Nature** offered greater potential for drama, and this was exploited in full. A description of the layout indicates:

The Beginning – Gallery 13 Corridor – Dark, one or two works dramatically lit.
Intention – dramatic impact.
The Heavens – Maximum contrast light. Intention – joy, optimism, expansion into space and infinity.
The general hang will emphasise the general movement from chaos to defined form. ⁶³

Hooper-Greenhill has noted that this emphasis on dramatic impact is a feature of what she defines as the 'post-museum': 'Where the modernist museum transmitted factual information, the post-museum also tries to involve the emotions and the imagination of visitors'. ⁶⁴

One dramatic detail that now survives only in a written account of the exhibition was the inclusion of a soundtrack at the entrance. Waldemar Januszczak described it thus:

[this exhibition] adds so significantly to our understanding of modern art, that I can even forgive the show its horrendous beginning – the Book of Genesis itself.

'In the beginning,' booms a deep voice on the psychedelic audio-visual display, 'this exhibition has been organised in the belief that the opening words of Genesis hold a clue to our understanding of modern art'. ⁶⁵

⁶² Letter from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, dated 8 August 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/54.

⁶³ Ms. description of exhibition layout. GMA A33/1/2/127/49.

⁶⁴ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 143.

⁶⁵ Waldemar Januszczak, 'The very model of creation', in *Guardian*, 15 August 1984.

This is the only reference found to this particular feature of the exhibition, alerting us to the difficulty of recreating the experience of visiting any exhibition, but demonstrating that the design of this exhibition was intended to make a strong impact.

Most reviews were complimentary. The Sunday Telegraph waxed lyrical:

The inaugural exhibition... is a stroke of genius which will remain in the memory of anyone who visits it. It washes 20th century art clean of over-intellectualising. It restores the wonder of artists confronting the world, and the wonder of art for the viewer. For it has achieved what so many well-intentioned exhibitions, books, commentators and even artists have failed to do for us: ... it has restored art to the people.⁶⁶

This surely reiterates the idea of curator as creator – achieving more even than the artists themselves! Appreciation of the lack of ‘over-intellectualising’ shows how successful the shift from the original scheme had proved. Clare Henry, so critical of the location, was impressed by the exhibition, calling it ‘a very special inaugural show ... which will appeal both to the specialist and the general public’.⁶⁷ The *Times*’ commentary demonstrated the response Hall had hoped to elicit: ‘[it] gives us salutarily to reflect, as all good exhibitions should, on whether our received ideas are necessarily right’. The review continued: ‘**Creation** is one of the most beautiful as well as provocative shows on anywhere in Britain at the moment... If the new gallery can keep up this standard there are few comparisons it need fear’.⁶⁸ The persistent theme in the critical response to the exhibition was appreciation of the successful attempt to engage specialists and general public alike; it was a vindication of Hall’s earlier determination to retain a comprehensive approach to modern art.

Returning to Ferguson’s assertion that exhibitions represent the institutions that stage them, what conclusions can be drawn about the SNGMA from this analysis of **Creation**? It showed itself to be an ambitious institution, eager to establish itself as a member of the international museum community. As an institution, it comprised more than one voice, not always speaking in harmony, and this resulted in the need for compromise. It considered its primary duty to encourage a wider public appreciation of modern art, and it felt it had the right to present an authoritative version of what it believed was the essence of that art, even withholding certain

⁶⁶ Michael Shepherd, ‘The new in the old’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 19 August 1984, p. 12.

⁶⁷ Clare Henry, *Glasgow Herald*, 11 August 1984.

⁶⁸ John Russell Taylor, ‘Visual wonders proudly unveiled’, *The Times*, 14 August 1984, p. 8.

currents that might subvert the intended message. All its ambition, however, had to be tempered by the restrictions placed on it by its size, and the resources available to it, including the willingness of other galleries to collaborate. These apparently secondary factors played a central role in determining the final version of the exhibition that was seen by the public. Equally the same factors affect the institution more generally.

In the final internal assessment of the exhibition, it is interesting to note the criteria for considering it a success:

From our point of view as organisers, the most important result is that the exhibition was thought to break new ground in the understanding of modern art, and it succeeded in appealing to many people who might have felt baffled or alienated by modern art before.⁶⁹

Hall had achieved what he had set out to do: inaugurate the gallery with a pioneering exhibition that ‘broke new ground’ and appealed even to those with no prior affection for modern art. As a benchmark for all future exhibitions, it was ambitiously high.

The exhibition broke new ground also in terms of its funding. It was the first exhibition held by the SNGMA that received commercial sponsorship. This is another highly controversial issue within museums. Some commentators see it as a dangerous relationship that can damage the integrity of the museum. Annie Coombes talks of ‘the hidden agendas of corporate sponsorship and “objective” museum scholarship, but also the inextricability of discourses of cultural continuity and/or cultural transformation as a result of contact with western capitalism’.⁷⁰ The issue has grown in importance over time, as sponsorship is now taken for granted as the primary source of funding for exhibitions, and this has presented several practical problems for the Scottish institution. The early negotiations with commercial enterprises carried out by the SNGMA, however, reveal a quaintly earnest spirit, far removed from the slick professionalism of today’s officially designated Sponsorship office. Hall contacted David Donald, a Director at Robert Fleming Holdings, with this offer regarding the upcoming Samuel J. Peploe exhibition:

... perhaps there are other ways in which we could make the proposition a little more attractive to you. I would assume that we shall be asking you for the loan of a number of your paintings by Peploe, and you might like to have copies of the Catalogue to give away to visitors. Apart from this, perhaps Guy would be able to

⁶⁹ Draft letter to be sent to lenders. GMA A33/1/2/127/59.

⁷⁰ Annie Coombes, ‘Inventing the ‘Postcolonial’: Hybridity and Constituency in Contemporary Curating’, in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 486-497 (p. 493).

assist you with the cataloguing of the other Peploe paintings (or indeed those by other colourists).⁷¹

The need to raise private sponsorship once again put the SNGMA (and indeed the whole of the NGS) at a distinct disadvantage over the London galleries. Fewer major companies were based in Scotland, and it was impossible to achieve the visitor numbers seen at the big blockbuster-type exhibitions held in London. The question of sponsorship within the arts always raises concerns about potential clashes of interest and distorting the institution's clarity of vision, but these rather meagre benefits Hall offered to Donald hardly constitute bending to any corporate agenda.

The 1985 exhibition of works by Peploe proved very popular, attracting large numbers, perhaps highlighting the interest in local artists. At a time when visitor numbers were becoming central to how the gallery was assessed, this was very welcome. In the case of the Peploe exhibition, however, it was not simply the plain numbers that indicated the exhibition's success: the gallery also received a handwritten letter from a visitor, expressing how much pleasure she had derived from seeing it.⁷² The letter encapsulated all the enthusiasm that can be evoked by a positive encounter with art. In the midst of all the moves towards bureaucratising the work at the gallery, this letter gave enormous pleasure to the curating team, reminding them that there were other measures of success beyond government targets.⁷³

⁷¹ Letter to David Donald at Robert Fleming Holdings Ltd., 27 February 1985. GMA A33/1/2/130/13.

⁷² Letter from Mrs Mellis, 5 September 1985. GMA A33/1/2/130/27.

'Having read a report of your exhibition in the Yorkshire Post, I was filled with the desire to see it for myself, since such an assembly of his works may never be seen again in my lifetime. This seemed an impossibility as my husband is in the midst of a tiresome illness. However, on Wednesday morning I suddenly hit upon the idea of flying to Edinburgh for the day from the Yorkshire airport which is only 10 minutes drive from my home ... I found that by taking a plane at 11am and using a taxi from Turnhouse to the Gallery and back to catch the 3.50 plane – I could have a good two hours with the paintings and only be away from my husband from 10 until 5.

'We are not wealthy people and the £120 it would cost seemed a lot of money and as I had never flown in my life and felt pretty nervous about it, I could well have "chickened out". But I did not and so yesterday, Thursday 4th Sept became one of the happiest days of my whole life!

'I loved the Gallery – so quiet and restful and intimate and the Peploe paintings gave me enormous pleasure and inspiration....

'May I thank you for putting on this truly lovely exhibition – I'm sure it has given pleasure to all who have seen it and the experience of that day out has opened new horizons to this hitherto earthbound OAP!

Mrs Mollie Mellis'

⁷³ Reply from Hall, 10 September 1985: 'I must thank you for your delightful letter of 5th Sept, which has been a source of pleasure to us all here.' GMA A33/1/2/130/27.

The gallery continued with the series of small-scale educational exhibitions that it had begun in Inverleith House, intended to help audiences understand and appreciate modern art by looking in detail at one work from the collection. The fourth exhibition in the series ‘Pictures in Focus’ examined Stanley Spencer’s *The Passion*. Although these exhibitions were relatively inexpensive as they did not require many loans, they nevertheless entailed much research by curators, and there was a growing expectation on the part of the public of a high standard of accompanying material for such exhibitions. One visitor wrote to complain at the lack of a glossy leaflet. The reply by Fiona Pearson, who had curated the display, reveals some of the frustration felt by the staff:

The limited expenditure given to the small “Painting in Focus” displays also meant that I was unable to produce a poster – or a hand bill. We are not sitting on huge funds. Do you realise that it is only because there are two vacant posts of Keeper grade – that we have been able to keep open all the galleries throughout the autumn and winter months? These salaries have paid for the warding staff required for this building. We were given a larger building for the GMA, but no more staff to cope with the larger area to be warded or cleaned.⁷⁴

As this letter states, simply keeping the gallery open was an achievement. The previous winter, there had been several times when the upper floor had had to be closed because there was not sufficient warding staff – a situation that was replicated in the sister galleries. The following year it was decided that keeping the galleries open should take priority, so the recruitment of curatorial staff to replace people who had left was delayed. It is an intriguing dilemma, deciding how to allocate resources and maintain the balance between displaying and preserving. The first priority of any museum has historically been to look after its collections. Public collections are held in trust on behalf of the people, so the gallery has a duty to keep them safe but also to have them available to view. If it is not possible to display works because they are not adequately protected, the museum is failing to perform its duty, but equally if there is no curator to decide what and how to display, the museum has lost its function as a source of authority.

In all discussions about accepting the John Watson’s venue, the freestanding gymnasium, located to the rear of the main building, had always been considered the area best suited to more radical and adventurous forms of contemporary art. In the summer of 1986, it was used for the first time for an exhibition intriguingly entitled **P**

⁷⁴ Letter from Fiona Pearson, 3 April 1986. GMA A33/1/2/136/1.

is for Poodle, an installation by the Canadian group of artists, General Idea. It seemed the ideal exhibition for the space, as the artists appreciated precisely its rundown state: ‘we very much want to keep the peeling paint and somewhat abandoned atmosphere of this old building’.⁷⁵ Even so, there were still costs involved, and the gallery risked tarnishing its reputation by not providing adequate services. The Canadian High Commission was providing finance for the exhibition, and they complained that the SNGMA had not fulfilled its part of the bargain: ‘I was disappointed that there was no on-site signage nor any promotional pamphlet as had been promised. In addition, the poster and press-release appeared very late in coming. I also understood that you would be providing additional technical support which turned out to be student or casual labour?’⁷⁶ It was important for the gallery to avoid such situations, as they could undermine its credibility as a serious institution.

The main exhibition for the festival period in 1986 was a retrospective exhibition of the works of John Bellany, as part of Hall’s planned series of one-man shows. These were intended to feature artists in midlife who had built up solid reputations but were not necessarily either fashionable or topical. The idea for this series had a double function – to allow the public the opportunity to review an artist’s body of work, but also to help that artist by raising his profile, fulfilling its role as a ‘national’ institution by promoting the nation’s artists. Bellany acknowledged ‘the perpetual encouragement’ he had received, and wrote to express his gratitude to the entire staff of the gallery for their support.⁷⁷ Again, the exhibition proved the particular appeal of local artists. The visitor numbers, at just over 30,000, exceeded even those for **Creation**, making it the gallery’s most successful exhibition to date. The first two years in the new premises, despite the financial restrictions, presented encouraging signals for the future.

⁷⁵ Letter from A. A. Bronson, 1 February 1986. GMA A33/1/2/139.

⁷⁶ Letter from Canadian High Commissioner, 13 August 1986. GMA A33/1/2/139.

⁷⁷ The handwritten letter was addressed to all secretarial and fine art staff, thanking them for their ‘constant cooperation and endless patience throughout my exhibition. Your perpetual encouragement and optimism made the whole venture one of the most memorable events in my life’. Letter dated 9 September 1986. GMA A33/1/2/140/14.

‘an extraordinary yet oddly inconspicuous story of success’

Following the move, the collection was once more re-assessed, now that it could be displayed in more spacious surroundings. Reviews of the new building had commented on the success achieved by the gallery since its inception:

Altogether it has been an extraordinary yet oddly inconspicuous story of success, for the Gallery was instituted only in 1960 with a purchase grant of £7,500, which would seem for once to have been more an indication of Scottish optimism than providence. Douglas Hall, its first and only Keeper, has worked miracles in building up so distinguished and special a collection, and the city is considerably in his debt. The signs are, however, that a certain local pride and, perhaps even more, a natural curiosity, have been reactivated by the hullabaloo of these past few weeks, for attendances are now gratifyingly, unprecedentedly, high.⁷⁸

The ‘special’ quality of the collection alluded to in this comment vindicates Hall’s insistence on choosing individual works on their own merits rather than selecting standard works conforming to a predetermined programme. Another review made this point more directly:

Throughout the 12 ground floor galleries with their selections from the permanent stock, the unique quality of this collection shines out. It may not contain ‘one of everything’ but almost every single work carries the sense of having been carefully and unhurriedly chosen by Douglas Hall with an eye to quality rather than mere ‘artistic brand image’...

The joy of this collection for the connoisseur is, time and again, that leap of the heart to see *that* painting by *that* artist, rather than just a ‘representative’ one; and of course, the same joy is waiting there to inform the stranger.⁷⁹

This description offers a strong validation of Hall’s inclusion of the ‘atypical’ work; by concentrating on selecting the best available rather than the most representative, his collection retains its interest. One is not simply recognising a string of names; rather one is faced with individual works, each of which deserves its place for its own qualities, not for who created it.

Hall was able to use this favourable reception of his approach in the next major policy review carried out shortly after the move, and following the arrival of a new Director of the National Galleries of Scotland, Timothy Clifford. In his ‘Report on Future Objectives’ commissioned by the new Director, Hall wrote:

⁷⁸ *Financial Times*, 28 August 1984.

⁷⁹ Michael Shepherd, ‘The new in the old’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 19 August 1984.

To build on our perceived success, within the money and the space likely to be available, means above all trying to maintain the individualism, humanism and optimism that have been remarked on, avoiding both international stereotypes and the merely interesting, and taking a great deal of time over the purchase of contemporaries.⁸⁰

The description summarises Hall's vision for the collection, which rested on an assessment of every work purely on its intrinsic merit. He also took into consideration the local audience. However much he aspired to gain international recognition for the gallery, he had never lost sight of what he believed the local public would accept. He used the example of the Eindhoven Museum in the Netherlands, which 'exerted influence at a distance by an exclusive devotion to the most cult-like aspects of modernism' as one he would not like to emulate, precisely because it was indifferent to its local public. 'I have never had any inclination to this policy, and I believe the situation of Edinburgh demands something different, which it has now to an extent got.'⁸¹ At this point, Hall was quietly confident that the project could now proceed, and the gallery could continue to evolve as it had been doing, but with the advantage of more space.

Change of Direction

His optimism, however, proved premature. The long-awaited move into adequately sized premises coincided with a profound shift in the relationship between museums and government. As part of much wider changes in all publicly financed bodies, the galleries were instructed to carry out a thorough review of the organisation as a whole, to contribute ideas to the Scottish Education Department (SED) for what was referred to as a 'corporate financial plan'. David Campbell of the SED wrote to the Trustees explaining that 'what we require is a strategic overview ... which provides some indication of how we are to measure progress'.⁸² This marked the start of a new approach to the arts, based on business methods such as 'performance indicators'. These discussions had just begun when the new Director arrived at the NGS, and it became his responsibility to oversee the internal review.

⁸⁰ Report entitled 'Future Objectives for the SNGMA', 6 March 1985, presented at GMA Committee meeting, 28 March 1985.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Letter from David Campbell, 25 January 1985, Board Room Minutes, February 1985.

Upon arrival, Clifford instigated a comprehensive appraisal of the management structure of the overall NGS organisation, and concluded that it should become more centralised. It had evolved into a clear federal system, where the three component galleries acted with considerable autonomy: since the mid-1970s, each held its own Committee meetings and received a pre-determined allocation of the purchase funds, although always deferring ultimately to the final decision of the Board of Trustees.⁸³ Clifford was concerned that the main historic collection at the National Gallery was inadequate: ‘unless something very substantial is done to help Scotland will decline into a provincial backwater having a charming collection that can never afford to add appropriate pictures to its existing collections’.⁸⁴ His solution was to keep all the money previously assigned separately to the three galleries in one block ‘so that it will be possible if necessary every year to make at least one substantial purchase’. Clifford saw the three galleries as one unit: ‘The NGS are in reality one collection of the Scottish Nation’s Fine Arts split into three locations’. He altered the practice of holding three separate Gallery Committee meetings to which Trustees were invited, substituting these with Gallery Committee meetings chaired by the individual Gallery Keeper and comprising the staff of the gallery rather than the full Board of Trustees, with a written report of the meeting then submitted to the Board.

In his report he presented a colourful sustained analogy between the Galleries and a bakery, taking for granted the analogy with ‘commercial ventures’, and the need for the Galleries to emulate them.⁸⁵ Hall was reluctant to devolve responsibility and lose the direct contact with Trustees, and protested at Clifford’s intention to unite the separate purchase funds into a single pot; he complained that GMA’s purchase fund would be reduced from £624,000 to £200,000, and saw the changes as detrimental to the autonomy the galleries had grown used to. His reply to the proposed new management system states rather wearily: ‘... [the] euphoria of the opening events ...

⁸³ Regarding the management structure, Clifford wrote: ‘The present management structure is not hallowed by great antiquity for it was devised in 1975 during Hugh Scrutton’s directorship, [Scrutton replaced David Baxandall in 1970, retiring in 1977] “to facilitate and speed up the process of decision making”. In reality it robbed the directorship almost completely of executive power, rendering him a mere cipher, who albeit retained his power of veto.’ Financial Plan: Management Revision, attached to Board Room Minutes, January 1986.

⁸⁴ ‘Corporate Plan: Problems and Opportunities facing NG’: report attached to Board Room Minutes, January 1986.

⁸⁵ ‘It is now up to the Director to provide the well-equipped bakery, ensure that the oven is efficient and reliable, select the finest recipe and then have the Gallery staff bake tray after tray of delicious cakes. Like all good commercial ventures, we must explore through market research, who our potential customers are, and identify what it is they want. For cakes, like galleries, a winning, repeatable (but allowing for variety within the formula) is what is wanted.’

is now definitely at an end, and the Galleries must consider how best to live with a GMA of greatly reduced status and style'.⁸⁶ This is hardly the tone one might have expected now that the gallery had achieved so much of what it had been urgently seeking over the previous fifty years; a decent-sized gallery space and a well-rounded collection of twentieth century art. Hall was concerned, however, that the proposed changes would undermine the prospects for the future, just at the moment when they should have been able to develop. He outlined his vision for the institution:

There are only a limited number of ways in which a museum of modern art can build a reputation or serve a public.... Our reputation was built on the quality of our acquisition of mature forms of twentieth century art. We were both constrained and enabled to do it this way by the size of Inverleith House... Acquisitions of this quality cannot be continued unless we have regular access to the central fund.

He made an appeal for greater recognition of the work carried out:

In the end the Gallery must survive as a centre for collecting, exhibiting and study and must depend on the quality and morale of its staff and the support they receive from central departments (which is of course a two-way process). It is not in the interests of the Trustees to depress or repress those aspects of the running of the Gallery which have created the reputation it has....

The GMA is now an established and respected part of the Edinburgh scene, and has enormous assets in its favour – an excellent collection, a fine historical building, a magnificent site awaiting full development, a successful restaurant and a good bookshop.... In our opinion it is a mistake to suppose that this institution can be perceived as nothing but a 'department' of the NG, as if it occupied a few rooms under the same roof, or that support for it can be turned on and off at will without causing serious damage. We hope that the Trustees... recognise this.... In that way, the Gallery will emerge strengthened and not weakened as we otherwise have reason to fear.⁸⁷

The response to this report was not as Hall might have hoped. Clifford explained in equal detail how he felt the organisation should be run:

Any large organisation to be run effectively, whether it be a commercial business, the armed forces, or an art gallery, needs to have a clear pyramidal staff structure... for flow of ideas and information. The Director will chair the meetings of the Gallery Committees. All communications between Keepers and Trustees will be routed through the Director... As a result, the Director will be more intimately involved with all NGs, staff and concerns.⁸⁸

Although Hall would have liked the opportunity to remain longer in charge of the Gallery in its new home, his request to extend his period of tenure was not granted,

⁸⁶ Report entitled 'The Gallery of Modern art under the new management system', 2 July 1986, attached to Board Room Minutes, July 1986.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Financial Plan: Management Revision, 28 January 1986, with Board Room Minutes, January 1986.

and he retired at the end of 1986. This occasioned further comments alluding to the personal quality of the collection he had created, almost from scratch:

I have always associated the Gallery and its collection with you and the notion that each object in the Gallery's display was your personal choice, gave each of my visits added dimension and I am sure that there will be others who will miss that 'one man's collection' feel whenever they visit the gallery in the future.⁸⁹

This was a fitting tribute as it synthesised all that Hall had fought to achieve – a collection with a strong identity that reflected a genuine passion for all the works.



Figure 14: Douglas Hall beside Henry Moore sculpture, *Two piece Reclining Figure No. 2*, outside John Watson's building

⁸⁹ Letter from John Hoole, 17 December 1986. GMA A33/1/2/148.

CHAPTER 4

Belford Road (II)

New Keeper

The new Keeper appointed to replace Douglas Hall was Richard Calvocoressi, who had served as Hall's assistant for a brief period during the 1970s. The intervening years had been spent at the Tate in London, where he was involved in building up the collection of Viennese avant-garde art of the 1960s. He arrived in Edinburgh in the summer of 1987 in time for the opening of an exhibition of works by the Futurist, Giacomo Balla.¹

The arrival of the new Keeper marked a new beginning also for the building. The move to John Watson's had been fundamentally successful, but there were still adjustments to be made. Calvocoressi quickly assessed the potential of the space and made some alterations:

... he has waded straight into action. Already the entrance hall has been altered to bring in two large sculptures by Marini and Epstein, and the shop in the main gallery has been relegated to the audio-visual room, to make this splendid space into an open sculpture gallery which will link with an outside sculpture court. A woodland path to connect the gallery with the Water of Leith walk, which extends from Leith to the Pentlands, will be designed by the sculptor David Nash.²

There had been long discussions about locating the shop in the central hall prior to the move, and the final decision to place it there had been taken because it was felt that the large windows and the fireplaces would make the room too awkward for display purposes. As the conversion had been carried out in a rush and on a budget,

¹ This could have been a disaster; the lorry transporting the works to Edinburgh from their first showing at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford broke down *en route*, and it was only thanks to the professionalism of the transport company, who recognised the danger of works travelling in unequipped lorries and acted accordingly, contacting the nearest museum to request assistance. One of the first letters Calvocoressi wrote as Keeper was to the Yorkshire Museums Service to thank them for their assistance: '... thank you for your heroic part in rescuing the Balla exhibition in transit. Having just taken up post, I have only now learnt from my colleagues the full extent of our debt to you for lending your alarmed lorry and also driving up with a member of your own staff.' GMA A33/1/2/146.

² Leslie Geddes-Brown, 'Ginger Group in a Tweed Suit – New Keeper at Edinburgh's Museum of Modern Art, *Sunday Times*, 2 August 1987.

clearly some decisions needed to be reviewed in the light of practical experience. The alterations impressed the Director; Timothy Clifford reported that:

Richard told us ... his immediate ambitions and then put them speedily into effect. He removed the information desks from the entrance hall, swept the bookshop out of the central Gallery and put it into the old 'Eye-Opener' room which had never functioned. The large Gallery ... now functions as a splendid indoor sculpture court.³

The 'Eye-Opener' room had been conceived as a modern addition to the services offered by the gallery, providing an audio-visual introduction to the major themes of modern art on display throughout the rest of the building. Its swift decline into obsolescence was an early example of how difficult it is for galleries to adapt to changing technologies; this is true both for the educational resources they try to incorporate and for the challenging technological innovations employed in many forms of contemporary art. By moving the shop into this room, however, the retail space was greatly reduced. It is difficult to imagine such a reduction taking place today, since gallery shops have become increasingly central to operations and often occupy large areas.

Calvocoressi immediately set about assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. The gallery to which he now returned had grown considerably in stature, both in terms of the collection and in terms of the space available, but it was still involved in the process of 'catching up' with many of the important trends of the century. At his first Board meeting in September 1987, he gave his early assessment of the SNGMA's permanent collection and how he believed it should develop. His assessment looked at all aspects of the gallery's multiple roles. He admitted that it would be difficult for him to do in Edinburgh what he had done at the Tate, as prices had recently risen so much, but expressed his interest in such European movements of the 1950s and 60s as COBRA, Nouveau Realisme, Viennese Actionism and Fluxus, noting that with the exception of Nouveau Realisme, none were represented in the SNGMA's collection. At the same time he noted gaps in the holdings of Scottish works, and announced his intention to purchase works by the older or 'exile' generation of post-war Scots, including William Gear, Edoardo Paolozzi, William Turnbull and John Bellany. He was also keen to introduce applied art into the gallery, echoing Cursiter's earlier vision for all-encompassing displays.⁴ He hoped to broaden

³ Director's Report, 27 July 1987, attached to Board Room Minutes, July 1987.

⁴ His most important exhibition while Assistant to Douglas Hall had been dedicated to Alastair Morton and the Edinburgh Weavers (29 April-29 May 1978).

the scope of the museum to include such Scottish artists as Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Basil Spence, whose work straddled the categories of fine and applied arts.

The economic conditions were not favourable to extravagant exhibitions, but there was still a recognition that temporary exhibitions were essential to retain public interest in the newly located gallery. The second exhibition of 1987, entitled **The Vigorous Imagination: New Scottish Art**, was a survey of contemporary Scottish painting and sculpture, and it proved significant for a generation of Scottish artists.



Figure 15: Installation shot of **Vigorous Imagination**

As so often, the exhibition had an almost fortuitous genesis. The SNGMA had been asked if it would like to participate in the 1986 Edinburgh International Festival theme of the Scottish Enlightenment, but the suggestion came too late for that year. The concept gained ground, however, and the idea for an exhibition showcasing contemporary Scottish art took hold. This exhibition combined features of several of Hall's categories: it was in part a 'patriotic' type, providing a platform for local artists, but also a 'supportive' type, intended to consolidate the reputation of the

artists shown.⁵ The introduction to the catalogue explains: ‘We decided the emphasis should be on a selection of talented young artists, who were still of an age to benefit from the support and acclaim that had too often been denied to their elders’.⁶ This marked an important step for the gallery. Now that it had more space and staff, it was no longer satisfied to reflect trends, but hoped to nurture future talent, marking a stronger commitment to contemporary, locally-produced art than it had previously shown. The exhibition proved immensely successful with the public, with final attendance figures reaching a record-breaking 96,368. Its very success, however, is given a negative interpretation by Craig Richardson. He refers to the ‘hubris’ of the exhibition, and is unhappy with what he perceives as an attempt ‘to capture, institutionalise and popularise the international market-led renewal “zeitgeist”’:

The failings of a Scottish national-traditional project cannot be laid at the door of the individual artists, many of whom were far more innovative than the Introduction ... suggested. The exhibition played out the perceived collective demand for such representation and satisfied these desires, as evidenced by its high visitor attendance numbers.⁷

The analysis concedes little to the critical judgement of the visitors, implying that the numbers were high simply because the exhibition played to a public desire to believe in a national tradition. Such criticism is difficult to prove without extensive visitor surveys, but the exhibition’s impact was undoubtedly strong. John Calcutt, writing in the catalogue for a touring exhibition of contemporary Scottish art in 2001, discussed its effects:

The mounting of **The Vigorous Imagination** at the SNGMA in 1987 had done much to canonise the work of a generation of broadly expressionist, predominantly figurative painters. Howson, Currie, Wisniewski, Campbell, alongside others such as Gwen Hardie, Keith McIntyre, June Redfern and Stephen Conroy, were indelibly stamped with the imprimatur of the academy.

⁵ In the period leading up to the move to Belford Road, Hall had drawn up a set of five categories of exhibitions appropriate for the institution:

- i) *the ‘exemplary’ approach, ‘bringing to Scotland’ this or that aspect of contemporary work*
- ii) *the ‘supportive’ approach, designed to consolidate the reputation of, or provide an opportunity for a certain artist or group*
- iii) *the text book ‘historical’ approach designed to let people see what they may only have read about*
- iv) *the ‘thematic’ approach, designed to expose ideas or connections that had not been realised before.*
- v) *‘patriotic’ or locally supportive aspect*

GMA Committee Minutes, 11 January 1983.

⁶ Anthony Jones, “Stands Scotland Where It Did?”, in *The Vigorous Imagination: New Scottish Art* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 1987), p. 23.

⁷ Richardson, p. 116.

Like it or not (and many of them did not) they had entered into official culture, assimilated into a recognisable and respectable tradition of painting.⁸

The exhibition had succeeded in fulfilling one of the institution's less tangible functions, to affect the development of the national artistic product. It was the first time the gallery had exercised an ability to 'canonise' contemporary works; this was evidence of its growing status, but opened it up to fresh criticism. The ambiguity felt by the artists on entering into official culture is further evidence of the paradox facing the national institution in its engagement with the contemporary. From one perspective, it is appropriate for the national cultural institution to stamp its imprimatur on works it considers worthy. From the other, however, such an imprimatur stifles the notion of radical anti-establishment artistic practice, and can be unwelcome to the artists concerned. Once it has acquired the ability to confer status in this way, the gallery can also be criticised for canonising some works at the cost of others. Richardson is critical of the exhibition for its negative effect on earlier artistic production: 'The success at the core of **The Vigorous Imagination** assisted in the condemnation of the preceding decade's just-still-appreciable Scottish genuine avant-garde'.⁹



Figure 16: Installation shot of **Vigorous Imagination**

⁸ John Calcutt, 'There + Then', in Katrina Brown and Rob Tufnell, *Here + Now: Scottish Art 1990-2001*, Dundee: Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre, 2001), p. 14.

⁹ Richardson, p. 115.

For Timothy Clifford, the exhibition deserved praise:

It was just the sort of exhibition, loud, witty, elegant, political, and controversial that a national gallery should mount from time to time. I believe it will be seen in years to come to have been very important in the history of the development of Scottish post war art. It is good to see that the SNGMA are buying many of the finest works from the exhibition for the permanent collection.¹⁰

There were many purchases from the show, including works by Stephen Conroy, Peter Howson, Adrian Wiszniewski, Mario Rossi, Ron O'Donnell, Calum Colvin, Ian Hughes and Steven Campbell, thereby increasing significantly the gallery's holding of younger Scottish artists, but also giving an enormous boost to the careers of these young artists. The exhibition fulfilled many of the gallery's ideal criteria: it was popular with the public, it nurtured native talent, and it brought new audiences into the institution. The level of continued critical attention it receives suggests that its impact is still felt.

Held within only three years of the new gallery opening, the exhibition nevertheless 'necessitated the unhangings of over half the permanent collection, [and] provoked a crisis in our stores'.¹¹ It seems remarkable that the long-awaited move to larger premises should so quickly prove inadequate, but this highlights the importance of less glamorous, behind-the-scenes facilities such as storage, which have so little impact on the public's perception of the gallery, yet which determine its ability to function smoothly. Some other practical concerns were also posing problems reminiscent of those faced at Inverleith House; the same report continues: 'It is also very difficult for us to show large-scale canvases, since the majority of door openings at John Watson's are too narrow for them to fit through'.¹² Part of the reason for leaving Inverleith House had been its inability to show large-scale works, but the problem had evidently not yet been adequately solved.

Within a short time of his arrival, Calvocoressi realised that the situation regarding exhibitions would require careful handling, as seen in his reply to the offer from Nicholas Serota of an exhibition of works by Michael Sandle:

I am afraid there is little chance of our being able to take the Sandle exhibition. As you may have gathered, I am keen to scale down the number of exhibitions

¹⁰ Director's Report, 22 September 1987, Board Room Minutes, September 1987.

¹¹ Response to SED Report by Calvocoressi, attached to Board Room Minutes, January 1988.

¹² Ibid.

here in order to concentrate all our resources on displaying and building up the collection. This means that from 1988 we will hold one major loan exhibition each year, ideally during the Edinburgh Festival.¹³

This surely represented a small landmark for the institution. It had finally reached a point where it had enough works in its collection and enough space to arrange displays of these works that would provide the central focus of the gallery's activities for a while. The institution had finally come of age, and no longer had to rely so heavily on temporary exhibitions. It had reached the point where it made more sense to showcase the depth of works in the permanent collection in order to justify the hard work and expenditure that had gone into creating it. Ironically, perhaps, given this shift in focus away from exhibitions and towards the permanent collection, the major exhibition that was held in 1988 would prove immensely important for the future of the institution.

Institutional self analysis

In the meantime, the SED had produced their quinquennial report for the National Galleries. This contained the Department's response to the recent Williams Report that had delayed the move to John Watson's by seeking to solve the problems of the NMAS. The NMAS had been identified as an institution central to a growing public awareness of Scottish heritage interests and the Scottish governmental review sought to address this question more broadly. The SED report proposed a radical re-thinking of the organisational structure of the NGS, and suggested establishing an additional Scottish Gallery. This quickly became a fiercely debated issue for the NGS that persisted over the next ten years, involving all departments of the organisation. The debates were complicated by the shifting vision of the function of museums and galleries, which in the report were seen principally in terms of their contribution to the tourist industry in Scotland. This marks a clear change: the galleries were always acknowledged as contributing to the country's range of leisure services, but this aspect was secondary to their main purpose as cultural centres. Now there was a shift in emphasis, placing the entertainment role of the gallery on a par with the educational one. The role of museums in the formation of national identity now comprised the notion of a specifically tourist-dominated national identity. Cultural

¹³ Letter to Nicholas Serota, 15 September 1987. GMA A33/1/2/155/2.

institutions were to be used to promote a constructed narrative of Scotland. The discussions tended to focus on the historic Scottish collection, but any separate gallery of Scottish art would automatically raise questions about the art of the twentieth century.

As ever, at the heart of any discussions about new galleries in Edinburgh lay the problem of space. One idea put forward by the SED was the possibility of using the RSA building as an extension of the NGS covering the twentieth century.

Calvocoressi was vehemently opposed to this, on grounds that recall those expressed at the time of the opening, namely the inadequacy of the collection:

This idea should be rejected unless the Trustees are prepared to authorise the expenditure of a very large sum of money, ie several millions, over the next few years on building up the modern collection. While the GMA has some first-class early modern works, they are on the whole small or of an essentially domestic character, which does not matter as long as they hang at John Watson's, and mattered even less at Inverleith House (for which gallery most of them were acquired). But they would be swamped by the imposing environment of the RSA; added to which there simply aren't enough of them. When it comes to the twentieth century, the NGS is not yet a world-class collection: at the RSA this fact would become embarrassingly obvious.¹⁴

Such a critical analysis of the collection again highlights the close connection between the gallery space and the collection. Acquisitions had been tailored first to the limited space available at Inverleith House, but there had been no major policy change since moving into the larger venue at John Watson's, due also to the reduced budget since the move. The similarity between this comment and those made by Trustees in 1958, referring to potential embarrassment, reveals the extent to which the initial process of 'catching up' had been affected by the restricted frame of Inverleith House: the advantage of opening there had also brought the disadvantage of not permitting the purchase of representative large-scale works that had come to dominate modern art. The RSA building would have been a magnificent location for the SNGMA, but the institution was not yet capable of filling such an imposing frame.

The report also looked at how the collection should be formed, calling for 'genuinely contemporary or "new" art'. Such a comment from a civil servant displayed a lack of understanding of the intricacies of the art world. Calvocoressi responded by pointing

¹⁴ Response to SED Report.

out that it ‘would require far greater resources in terms of curatorial staff and travel money than are at present available to the GMA’. He went on to explain why it would be so much more costly:

For to acquire a work shortly after it has been made means being extremely well-informed as to who is up and coming, where he/she exhibits, and so on. Two or three specialist curators would need to be almost constantly on the move between London, Berlin, Cologne, Paris, Zurich, New York, Los Angeles, attending all the major private views, visiting artists in their studios etc. It is difficult enough to keep abreast of the avant-garde if you live and work in London – far harder in Edinburgh, which has no contemporary art market to speak of and only a tiny art scene of its own.¹⁵

This comment throws light on the particular difficulties facing the SNGMA; situated at some remove from the major centres of avant-garde art production inevitably caused delays in identifying trends and emerging artists. Calvocoressi was not bleakly despondent about future prospects, but he wanted to alter the focus. He questioned whether the policy of ‘buying back’ representative works from the important movements of the early years of the century should continue. He was worried that, in the intervening time, other more recent art had become as expensive as the earlier masters. Echoing Hall’s earlier pleas, he called for a review of the policy of ‘retrospective buying’, explaining:

In one sense the GMA is worse off than it was ten or fifteen years ago, since it has only partially ‘caught up’ with the heroic period of modern art... The moral is: you cannot hope to catch up without a massive increase in purchase funds. I feel that the time has come to look at the problem in a different way by asking ourselves the question ‘who are the great artists of our time?’, whether recently dead or living, and go all out to represent them.¹⁶

He was proposing a more strategic targeting of acquisitions to ensure maximum benefit. On the question of photography, Calvocoressi did not see the need to develop a separate collection at the GMA:

I would be happy to leave the collecting of photography to the NPG, which has shown expertise and flair in amassing such material; although there have been, and will be, occasions when the GMA buys the work of an artist who happens to use photography to express his particular vision (Richard Long, Arnulf Rainer etc.).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ He expanded on this dilemma: ‘– there is still no de Chirico, Duchamp, Beckmann, Schiele, Kandinsky, Boccioni, Brancusi, Malevich or Dali – while several important post-war movements, tendencies and individuals have been neglected: e.g. American abstract expressionism and Pop, Italian *arte povera*, Viennese art of the 60s, Fluxus, contemporary German painting and sculpture; de Kooning, Pollock, Rothko, Klein, Fontana, Fautrier, Johns, Rauschenberg, Warhol, Oldenberg, Stella, Bacon, Beuys, Rainer, Baselitz, Kiefer. To fill in these gaps would also now be very costly.’ Response to SED Report.

In this area, the SNGMA had not maintained the commitment to the wider range of modern art forms that had been envisaged by Cursiter, and that had been so central to the collection at MoMA. The fact that another part of the wider organisation of the NGS was involved in collecting photography allowed the SNGMA to overlook this art form, which many see as one of the quintessential fields of twentieth century art. In doing so, it inevitably restricted its collection, and it is only with the recent d'Offay acquisitions that it finally has a representative selection of photography.¹⁷

Calvocoressi concluded by pointing out the specific financial difficulties facing the GMA, in particular the need to pay VAT on much contemporary art and the ineligibility of the GMA for Heritage Fund money.¹⁸ The National Heritage Memorial Fund had become an important source of money for major purchases since its creation in 1980, but the GMA was at a severe disadvantage, as it was only available for works that had been in the country for at least 50 years, and was therefore inappropriate for most purchases made by them.

Exhibitions 1988 - 1990

Despite Calvocoressi's guarded reply to Serota about scaling down the exhibition programme, he oversaw an intensive programme for 1988. As noted above, the lack of exhibition space was a major problem, and other possibilities were eagerly examined. The suggested use of the RSA galleries for NGS exhibitions led to the proposal to mount a major modern art exhibition in the city centre space. Although Calvocoressi had rejected the idea of housing the institution within the RSA building, the prospect of mounting a major exhibition there offered many advantages. He saw it as an exciting opportunity to extend the scope of the GMA:

... if Picabia ... goes ahead next year at the RSA, it would also mean that we could show our public during the peak summer period the riches of our collection... This would be something to work towards over the next year, making some spectacular acquisitions with the view to 'unveiling' them in summer '88. The new Sculpture Gallery could be revealed, alongside the sequence of artists' rooms that I am planning.... New Scottish art would be well represented by acquisitions from the Vigorous Imagination. ... We might have an

¹⁷ The Acquisition Policy in 2007 notes a similar stance: 'We treat photography as a medium like any other, integrated with the rest of the collection.'

¹⁸ At the time of writing this report, the Inland Revenue charged VAT on imported works of art produced after 1973.

artist in residence and there could be developments on the landscaping front to show off. In short, it would represent a year under the new regime.¹⁹

The tone of this memo conveys the enthusiastic aspiration of a new Keeper to make his mark on the institution. In fact, many of these ambitions were realised the following year, and 1988 proved to be crucial for the gallery's future direction. The repercussions of this one decision proved pivotal in the development of the SNGMA, as it led ultimately to the move towards specialisation in one area of twentieth century art, Surrealism.

The Picabia exhibition was a bold choice for the first-ever NGS exhibition held in the RSA building. The artist, although an important figure in the art-historical narrative of twentieth century art, was not a well-known figure to the general public. As Calvocoressi pointed out: 'The last Picabia retrospective in Britain took place in London in 1964. An entire generation has thus grown up without a chance to appreciate the work of this controversial figure, much of which has been radically reassessed in recent years'.²⁰

Calvocoressi was particularly keen to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by the city centre venue. The exhibition was the central element, but around it he organised a series of collateral events including concerts and film screenings, and he arranged to install a café. These activities were not viewed favourably by the RSA members, who wrote to complain about the use of space:

With regard to the Festival Exhibition, the Members of Council were most disappointed to learn that a considerable amount of Gallery space would be used for purposes other than those for which it was intended. In earlier correspondence the President had suggested that the Galleries could have been used partly by the NGS for their Festival Exhibition and partly for our Joan Eardley Exhibition. It is always a pity when good exhibition space is not utilised to its full potential.²¹

This is a frequent dilemma in museums and galleries. Space is always at a premium, but the benefits to the institution from the judicious inclusion of facilities like cafes and shops can encourage visitors and increase revenue. In the case of the Picabia exhibition, there was also a clear strategy to make the experience of visiting a modern art exhibition an enjoyable one. Attention was paid not only to the display of the art works but also to the general atmosphere of the gallery, with potted palms introduced

¹⁹ Memo entitled 'Use of RSA Galleries by NGS', 20 August 1987, attached to Minutes.

²⁰ Letter to the Director of the Pompidou Centre, 7 September 1987. GMA A33/1/2/155/2.

²¹ Letter from Secretary of RSA, 14 March 1988. GMA A33/1/2/155/1.

to create ‘the right ambience’, to make visitors who may not have had much experience of modern art galleries feel welcome and not intimidated.²² Deciding what constitutes the best use of exhibition space is not always straightforward. The frame that the RSA provided was to be tempered with details that broke down the traditional austerity of the building. As a first experiment in the RSA building, the exhibition proved highly successful.²³

The response to the requests for loans for the Picabia show had been disappointing, and Calvocoressi felt the exhibition would benefit from additional material. He decided to broaden the range of works on display, and thought of the collection of Surrealist works held by Gabrielle Keiller. Gabrielle Keiller’s Surrealist collection made an ideal complement to the works of Picabia. Keiller’s connections with the SNGMA were long-standing. Douglas Hall had invited her to act as a Trustee for the NGS in the 1970s and she had subsequently established a close bond with the gallery that continued to thrive under the leadership of Richard Calvocoressi. She was persuaded to show her collection anonymously in a parallel exhibition entitled **The Magic Mirror**, the title coming from a work by Magritte, *Le Miroir Magique*. The collection was a perfect accompaniment to the main exhibition, giving visitors a wider understanding of Surrealism than could be drawn from the single-artist show. The exhibition proved enormously important for the gallery’s development, as it cemented relations with Keiller, whose collection of twentieth century art was among the richest in Britain. Her delight at the way it had been displayed and at the excellent catalogue written by Elizabeth Cowling of Edinburgh University prompted her to consider leaving her collection to the SNGMA.²⁴ Indeed, Calvocoressi reported to the GMA Committee in November 1989 that Keiller had decided to bequeath her collection to the NGS. The episode demonstrates the value of showing private collections well: it gives a collector great satisfaction to see her works well-displayed, and in this case was instrumental in persuading Keiller to select the SNGMA as her

²² ‘In order to create the right ambience for the two exhibitions of surrealist art of the 1920s and 30s, we would like to place potted palms and other suitable plants in the main public areas where there will be a café, bookshop and cinema.’ Letter to Botanics, 9 June 1988. GMA A33/1/2/155/1.

²³ The Picabia was an undoubted success, but it could have faced some major disruption from an unexpected source, the supporters of Ian Hamilton Finlay, following the French government’s decision to cancel Finlay’s contract for a Bicentenary Garden. The St Juste Vigilantes wanted the NGS to boycott every connection with France, including the Picabia exhibition.

²⁴ Keiller had intended to leave her collection to the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow, but was disinclined to do so after that museum proposed selling some works in its collection. The *Burlington Magazine* referred to the episode as ‘a salutary warning to museums and institutions which deaccession in order to defray running costs.’ Jeremy Lewison, ‘Gabrielle Keiller Collection’, *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 39, No. 1136 (November 1997), p. 812.

beneficiary. The benefits of nurturing good relations with private collectors are immense, particularly for a small institution. Small institutions can also offer greater rewards to collectors insofar as the works donated are more likely to be kept on display in a small gallery than in a large institution like, for example, the Tate. There is also the advantage of being able to maintain more direct contact; the smaller cohort of curators and the length of service of many of them lend continuity to relations with the collectors, building up a feeling of personal engagement with the institution. As Simon Knell suggests: ‘much of the work of museums takes decades to bear fruit – on the timescale of forestry and landscape management’.²⁵ The level of continuity within the smaller institution allows for such long timescales: the works owned by Keiller were finally bequeathed to the gallery in 1996, at which point the Minutes noted:

There was no doubt that **The Magic Mirror** exhibition and catalogue, neither of which at the time had made money or even covered their costs, were crucial in Mrs. Keiller’s decision to leave her collection to the GMA: she had made a new will shortly afterwards. This was an example of long-term thinking triumphing over short-term financial considerations. The collection was probably worth around £10 million.²⁶

The repercussions of this prospective bequest were decisive, as it provided an opportunity truly to excel in one area of twentieth century art, Dada and Surrealism. For the first time since opening almost thirty years earlier, it was agreed that it should no longer be the official policy to try to represent modern art universally. Instead, there should be a specific focus for the collecting activities of the GMA, in order to establish itself as an authoritative centre for Surrealist studies. The decision had a major impact on the future course of the permanent collection. Indeed, practically all future purchases were assessed in the light of this area of specialisation.

Meanwhile, the Gallery’s other activities were all continuing. As already mentioned, the programme of events for 1988 was intense. While the RSA was hosting the Picabia and Magic Mirror exhibitions, in the GMA itself there was an exhibition of works by Lucian Freud. Once again, just as at Inverleith House, the particular qualities of the premises added to the pleasure of the exhibition. The ‘frame’ was still

²⁵ Knell, p. 11.

²⁶ Minutes of GMA meeting, 10 January 1996. Similar remarks were made following the exhibition of works from Ken Powell’s collection: ‘It had been an important factor in Mr Powell’s stated intention to leave a number of fine works to the GMA in lieu of tax. It was thus noted that exhibitions and catalogues of a scholarly nature could benefit the Gallery in many ways, whatever their short term popularity.’ Minutes of GMA meeting, January 1993.

favourable to certain displays, in particular works whose impact benefited from an intimate encounter with the viewer; the interior at John Watson's had retained the sense of intimacy that had distinguished Inverleith House.²⁷ The exhibition prompted the gallery's first purchase of a work by the artist, the painting *Two Men*, completed just before the exhibition opened, and shown in the corridor outside the exhibition rooms.



Figure 17: Lucian Freud, *Two Men*

The purchase was controversial, however; at £350,000, it was the most expensive purchase of a work by a living artist, and the figure was ten times what the gallery had recently paid for a work by the Scottish artist, John Bellany, raising concerns that Scottish art was not afforded equal economic status. In recommending the purchase, Calvocoressi wrote: 'Freud was an artist whom one could not 'do on the cheap'. His output was small and the majority of his pictures were owned by a tightly-knit group

²⁷ 'Our exhibition of 37 paintings by Lucian Freud is so different from the Hayward Gallery retrospective that it could almost be the work of another artist. Freud came to Edinburgh himself to hang the paintings, which are entirely illuminated by daylight, except on unusually dark or stormy days when we are forced to use electric lighting...' Letter to Alastair Hicks, 22 July 1988. GMA A33/1/2/155/25.

of private individuals who rarely sold'.²⁸ There would be no opportunities for 'bargain-hunting' for a work of his. This argument sounds more suited to old masters, but it indicates the cachet still connected to the rarity value of certain works of art, their exclusivity adding to their appeal, and increasing the prestige of an institution which owns one.

As well as the Freud exhibition, there was a display of works by the local artist, Alexander Moffat, entitled **Portraits of Painters**. Calvocoressi saw this too as an opportunity to purchase a work, and he wrote to Moffat reflecting on which work to choose:

I find the portrait of Timothy Hyman the strongest psychologically, but can't help feeling we ought to go for Gwen Hardie, not only because she is a Scots painter represented in the collection, but because you have stylishly captured a most characteristic pose. A difficult decision.²⁹

This gives another intriguing insight into the reasoning behind individual purchases: sometimes one subject has more relevance to the overall context of the collection. This is what makes collections fascinating; noting the directions they take, and why they take them. In this case, the fact that works by Gwen Hardie were already in the collection made her portrait by Moffat the stronger candidate for inclusion.

The following year the gallery put together a major survey exhibition of Scottish art, entitled **Scottish Art since 1900**. There was an increased emphasis on Scottish themes in the NGS activities, in tandem with the ongoing discussions about a Scottish Gallery. Undoubtedly this had a political dimension. Despite the failure of the 1979 referendum to secure a devolved parliament for Scotland, the question of Scottish identity within the Union remained alive, and culture provided an important field where distinct characteristics could be identified. The exhibition combined the quintessentially 'patriotic' exhibition with the 'historical' according to Hall's definitions, as its objective was to 'tell the story of art in Scotland'. It was an ambitious project, clearly intended as a major contribution to the field of art historical scholarship as there was no previous comprehensive work on this subject. Over 300 works by 110 artists were included, and the displays again filled the whole of the Belford Road gallery.

²⁸ GMA Committee meeting, 11 July 1988.

²⁹ Letter dated 6 July 1988. GMA A33/1/2/153.

The exhibition received mixed reviews, with many of the negative reactions revealing the intrinsic danger of such wide-ranging survey exhibitions: to be truly comprehensive it has to include all trends, even those that might currently be deemed less interesting, and therefore inevitably there will be sections that do not appeal. Like any exhibition, however, the story that is presented depends on what works are available; often, stories have to be told with some of the central characters absent through lack of an adequate example. The widely divergent reviews highlight how difficult it is to produce a survey exhibition that fulfils its purpose as well as pleasing the critics.³⁰ Andrew Graham Dixon noted one aspect of Scottish art that could equally well refer to the institution: ‘Scottish art has often exhibited an unsure sense of cultural identity, combining an anxiety to be seen as distinctly Scottish with a nervous unwillingness to be seen as merely Scottish’.³¹ Returning again to Ferguson’s assertion that exhibitions reveal an institution’s identity, there were many parallels between this exhibition and the institution’s sense of itself, particularly the constant tension between creating a distinctively Scottish identity and a nervousness at being seen as only Scottish.

The exhibition had required an enormous amount of research and preparation, the most time-consuming task for curators, although also the most rewarding. The catalogue remains an authoritative source on the subject and, more importantly, it created much renewed interest in the field. Calvocoressi explained:

The exhibition was conceived very much for a home audience, with an emphasis on comprehensive coverage rather than on the highlights. Of course, this was criticised in the press, but in actual fact, it did fulfil our intentions very well and has already started a lot of local interest in doing research on 20th century Scottish art that desperately needs doing’³²

These aspects of the exhibition – the contribution to scholarship and the awakening of interest - must count as major successes for the gallery in its role as a national institution, even if the exhibition failed to convince all the critics. Success often lies

³⁰ The reviews ranged from the predictably caustic comments of Brian Sewell, who described its London showing as ‘dreary’, the unimpressed response of the Telegraph’s correspondent who noted the lack of critical selection, and the resulting ‘aesthetic oilslick, difficult to contain, impossible to come to terms with...’ to the enthusiastic appreciation of Marina Vaizey in the Sunday Times, who reported: ‘The glories of 20th century Scottish art have been a very well-kept secret until now, when the entire premises of the SNGMA in Edinburgh are occupied until September by the first general survey ever mounted of Scottish Art since 1900.’ (Brian Sewell, *London Standard*, 22 February 1990, Richard Dormant, *Daily Telegraph*, 2 August 1989, Marina Vaizey, *Sunday Times*, 16 July 1989).

³¹ Andrew Graham-Dixon, ‘Dependency Culture’, *Independent*, 18 July 1989, p. 14.

³² Letter to Henry Meyric Hughes, Director of Visual Arts, British Council, 23 November 1989. GMA A33/1/2/161/2.

in the future benefits that accrue from an exhibition, not simply in instant acclaim. This fact needs to be affirmed to avoid the risk of measuring success only in terms of ‘blockbuster’ style numbers attending, a measure that can dominate when commercial indices are used.

As a survey up to the present, the exhibition included many works by living artists. This presented some specific difficulties, because artists were not always willing for the works of theirs owned by the SNGMA to be shown in such a broad context. John Houston, for example, one of Scotland’s leading artists of the latter part of the twentieth century, wrote to Calvocoressi, expressing his concern about the works to be included by him and his wife, Elizabeth Blackadder. He enquired whether the exhibition consisted principally of the gallery’s own collection of Scottish works, or was a more comprehensive survey of modern Scottish Art:

If the latter we feel that our paintings in the NGMA collection are in no way representative of our work and certainly not the ones we would wish to be represented by in a major exhibition of modern Scottish Art.³³

Houston had identified the possible confusion in the exhibition’s frame. It purported to be a comprehensive account of the development of Scottish art over the 20th century, but it intended to compose the account mainly from the works in the gallery’s own collection. In the same way that collections tell the story that they can with the works they possess, the same would be true of this exhibition – it would tell the story of Scottish art of the twentieth century as illustrated by the institution’s collections, much of which had been acquired through bequests and therefore was not entirely representative of the institution’s own judgements. There were to be some loans to cover areas where the gallery had no appropriate examples, but otherwise the narrative was to be formed from the gallery’s own works. This creates an interesting challenge. The SNGMA had acquired works by Houston and Blackadder, but they did not possess a comprehensive collection of their entire oeuvre up to the present. Understandably, living artists do not always want their earlier work to be taken as representative of their current practice, particularly in a survey of the national school. This raises the question of the altered nature of works in a collection: the most common accusation against works of art passing into museum collections is that the process of entering a collection removes them from the external world into an eternal limbo, where they cease to develop and respond to changing circumstances. This state

³³ Letter dated 11 May 1989. GMA A33/1/2/161/52.

of permanent suspension is useful for the purposes of recording and conserving works, but in the case of artists whose style is still evolving, they might no longer wish to be defined by works from an indeterminate time in the past. Within the context of an artist's own retrospective, early works can be welcomed as illustrating the development of a personal style, but in a more general survey it is natural that living artists would wish to show their most recent works. The artist David Donaldson was even more distressed:

I did not consent to the inclusion of 'Sailors on a Jetty' to your exhibition. This panel was commissioned by the then Arts Council for a sailors van ... It was a very, very light-hearted response to that commission and in no sense an example of serious work of that time...³⁴

Decisions must be taken about such works. Artists have lost power over their creations once they are acquired, and the question of the rights of moral ownership is complex. It highlights again the notion of the 'frame'. Donaldson had completed a work for one, very particular context, and he objected to having the same work shown in such a different one, where the possible meaning of the work would be radically altered.

The review in the TLS illustrates how competitive the field of exhibitions had become. The reviewer, Timothy Hyman, expressed his disappointment with the layout; 'for a moment I thought we might be offered something of the Pompidou's innovatory approach, where each exhibition resurrected a cultural epoch in its entirety'.³⁵ Exhibitions must now measure up against major international successes, and a creative, innovative approach is expected. Simply assembling a selection of works relating to a common theme, and forming a credible narrative, is no longer sufficient. The development of exhibition design in addition to the straightforward selection of works for display introduces another layer to the preparation of exhibitions. The type of package referred to by Hyman, that could 'resurrect a cultural epoch in its entirety' had been attempted by the SNGMA in some of its smaller, explanatory displays in the 'work in focus' series both in Inverleith House and in the new space. These small-scale displays were, however, extremely time-consuming to prepare, and to extend such intense preparation to a large-scale exhibition such as **Scottish Art since 1900** was not within the scope of the under-

³⁴ Letter dated 26 April 1989. GMA A33/1/2/161/52.

³⁵ Timothy Hyman, 'Picture-making and painting-culture', *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 July 1989, p. 825.

resourced institution. Hyman's review continued with a comment that was more difficult to ignore: 'Overall there is a sense of routine, and a suspicion that most artists' representation is just what the permanent collection happens to have been bequeathed'.³⁶ As we have seen, there had been a conscious decision not to use too much of the purchase funds for Scottish works, as these were the works most likely to be bequeathed to the gallery. This had proved an accurate prediction, but there was always some discrepancy between works purchased and works accepted in bequests. The gallery was careful to reject works not of a high enough standard, but inevitably some of the works accepted were not what the gallery might have chosen. The exhibition revealed some of the shortcomings of the Scottish collection that had, indeed, 'happened to have been bequeathed'.

The programme for 1990 extended its focus beyond Scotland, covering a wide range of modern art, with several exhibitions of European art. In the spring, an exhibition of contemporary French art, from the FRAC collection (French Regional Collections; Nord, Pas de Calais), disrupted the familiarity of the institutional frame with works such as Daniel Buren's *Exploded Cabin*.



Figure 18: Installation shot of FRAC exhibition

The exhibition was spread over several venues within the city, including the French Institute and the Demarco Gallery. A joint venture like this offered a way of expanding beyond the boundaries of the gallery space, and the exhibition itself was innovative in its use of the institutional setting, with large installation pieces and

³⁶ Ibid.

works painted directly on the wall. There had been a few forays into displaying works of this type in Inverleith House in the exhibitions of Richard Long or Sol LeWitt, but as ever, the restricted size had prevented a more concerted engagement with such trends, whereas the new premises could accommodate this type of art better. It allowed the institution more options for showing contemporary works.

The summer saw two different exhibitions running concurrently. One was entitled **Kokoschka in Scotland**, and was intended to inaugurate a series of exhibitions exploring artists who had either worked in Scotland, or whose work had been particularly influential on Scottish art. As such, the series represented a good way to cover both a national and an international perspective. The other summer exhibition was of works by the German-born artist Wols. This too was meant to form part of a wider narrative within the gallery's exhibitions programme, exploring less well-known trends in European art of the mid-twentieth century. Wols was selected to carry on the story of the development of European art following the Picabia show of 1988. As Keith Hartley explained:

For the 1988 Edinburgh festival we mounted a successful exhibition of the work of Francis Picabia, in which we put a particular emphasis on the late paintings, showing, I think, Picabia's crucial role in the development of abstract art in Paris after the last war. We now wish to continue our investigation of art in Paris in this period with an exhibition of the work of Wols next summer... Wols has never been shown in Scotland – indeed rarely in GB at all – and we feel that there would be a particular interest in his work. Our collection is rich in German Expressionism, Surrealism and French art generally, which provides an excellent context for Wols.³⁷

The description underlines the ambition of the institution to present a distinctive interpretation of modern art. It highlights the interplay between exhibitions and permanent collection, as it made sense to show Wols because the collection was already rich in that area. It also points to the continuing policy of looking for areas of modern art that were currently not fashionable. The gallery was still searching for ways to expand the public's understanding of, and exposure to, as wide a selection of modern art as possible, not sticking to easily recognisable names. This strategy proved more difficult to sustain, however, in a world where commercial sponsorship had become an essential ingredient. The Edinburgh institution was already at a severe disadvantage in looking for sponsorship as there were fewer large companies operating in Edinburgh, and the gallery could never offer the numbers of visitors that

³⁷ Letter to Prof Honisch, Nationalgalerie, West Berlin, 7 November 1989. GMA A33/1/2/165.

would appeal to commercially-minded enterprise. This was noted in the Director's Report that year:

The exhibitions at the GMA, with the exception of Kokoschka, I feel ... were a little too arcane and esoteric... We can afford to put on pioneering, scholarly shows of limited public appeal, but we must be careful always to balance the diet with favourite names... Of course we must not fall into the trap led by consumerism, of only mounting populist exhibitions, but it is equally wise not to mount exhibitions purely for our own edification and indulgence.³⁸

The comment summarises the extremely delicate balancing act that a serious-minded institution must perform. It is necessary to find a way to retain artistic integrity while attracting large audiences but winning exhibitions are not easy to predict. The final exhibition of 1990 turned out to be by far the most successful. It was of small-format works by the contemporary English abstract painter, Howard Hodgkin, and praise was almost universal. John McEwen in the *Sunday Telegraph* called it: 'the most memorable exhibition in Britain this year by a contemporary artist...'³⁹ W. Gordon Smith, writing in *Scotland on Sunday*, was similarly full of praise:

In its short life as the nation's central showcase of modern art the great double salon on the ground floor of the SGMA[sic] at Belford Road, Edinburgh, has been strewn with sculpture and its walls set ablaze with riotous canvases. Yet it has never glowed with such luminous certainty or quivered with such lustre as it does in these dreich days under the spell of Howard Hodgkin.⁴⁰

The exhibition was popular also with the public, who attended in very high numbers. Attendances rose by 27% on the previous December, underlining the value of a popular show. The public were willing to travel to the awkward venue when there was something they wanted to see. The review in *The Times* alluded to the ongoing difficulty of space: 'The spacious ground floor of the gallery has been almost entirely assigned to the artist, and a good third of the permanent collection evicted. It was a generous curatorial decision, but one which, in the event, has been fully justified...'⁴¹

The need for more space was exacerbated by the prospect of a major bequest such as the Keiller collection. The prospect was very welcome, but nevertheless, it highlighted once more the dearth of storage facilities to which the GMA had access. The interplay between collection and container was continuing to affect the smooth operating of the gallery. In a foretaste of the imminent problem, early in 1990 Keiller requested the gallery's help in storing her collection while she moved house; the

³⁸ Director's Report, 28 September 1990, Board Room Minutes, September 1990.

³⁹ *Sunday Telegraph*, 16 December 1990.

⁴⁰ *Scotland on Sunday*, 23 December 1990.

⁴¹ Andrew Gibbon Williams, 'Small works of Wisdom', *The Times*, 14 December 1990.

request was naturally granted, but it brought to the surface the ongoing need for an extension. There had been discussions about possible extensions to the GMA almost from the time of moving in. This had always been seen as an ultimate goal, and part of the reason for accepting the venue was the scope it offered for expansion in the surrounding grounds. Plans were put forward at various times, but it was difficult to allocate funds or to reach consensus. In November 1989 it was suggested that an extension might be built linking the café to the Gym: by January 1990, this extension was referred to as essential if the Keiller bequest were to proceed. The Board Room Minutes from November 1991 describe the plans for Reserve Collection Storage: ‘the project had developed from a temporary shed to a permanent, quality building. Since it would be adjacent to a Gallery of modern art, they had decided to make the structure more like a piece of sculpture which would also reflect the building’s purpose’. The Cockburn Society responded to these plans by recommending ‘a more low-key design’.⁴² No decision was taken then, but in 1994, there was a further attempt to gain approval for another large storage facility. This time, the Cockburn Society’s response took a rather perverse change of direction, stating that the plans were ‘not innovative or stimulating enough to form part of the Gallery of Modern Art. The building is discreetly sited, and need not be so apologetic...’ On the contrary, these same 1994 plans were greeted by the Royal Fine Art Commission with little enthusiasm because ‘the proposed building does not relate in its appearance to the neighbouring buildings... The Committee is not convinced by the quality of design. The design expresses neither the building’s function nor its structure, nor an awareness of its beautiful surroundings.’⁴³ The difficulty of gaining approval and funding for an extension has consistently prevented the SNGMA from proceeding with its plans to extend, from the days of Stanley Cursiter up to the present. The comparison with the many extensions granted to the Tate over the course of the twentieth century emphasises the difficulty facing the Scottish institution.

Move towards Surrealism

The shift in emphasis towards establishing a centre of Surrealism was not immediate; rather it evolved into a specific strategy as other opportunities arose. The start of this

⁴² Comments included in Minutes of 15 November 1991.

⁴³ Correspondence attached to Board Room Minutes, June 1994.

targeted strategy can be discerned in a 1991 report discussing ways of funding the purchase of Miró's *Maternité*.

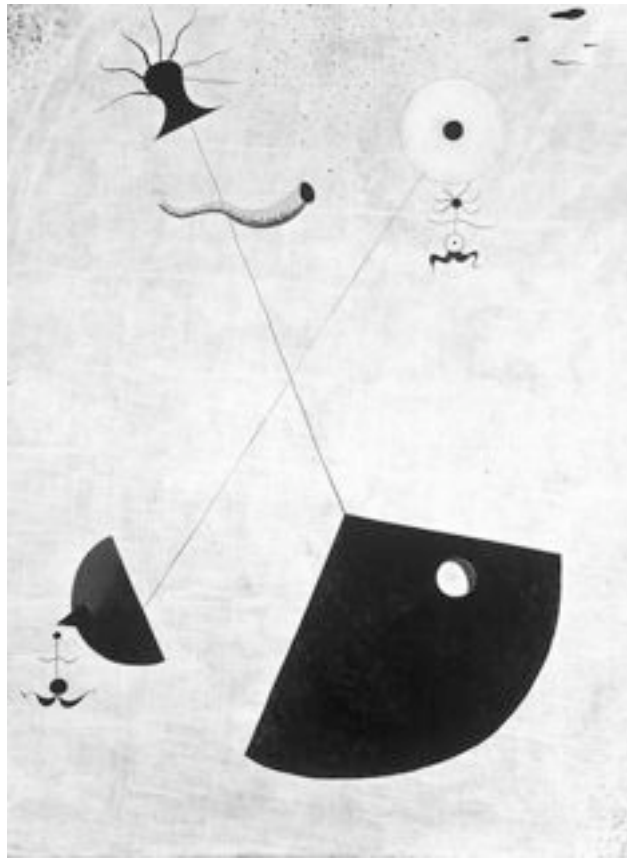


Figure 19: Joan Miró, *Maternité*

The work belonged to Antony Penrose, and was one of several great works that the Penrose family had placed on long-term loan to the gallery since 1982. This loan was referred to as the GMA's equivalent of the Duke of Sutherland's loan to the NGS, and comprised such works as Max Ernst's *La Joie de vivre*, Henry Moore's *The Helmet* and a Picasso collage *Tête*. The painting was an important work by an important artist, the type of 'masterpiece' that confers prestige on a collection. Penrose was prepared to allow the SNGMA favourable sale conditions, although at £1,750,000 (against a market valuation of £4 million), the cost was still very high for the small institution. The acquisition was seen not simply as the purchase of one work: it represented a commitment to a strategy that would hopefully allow the institution to progress in a specific direction. Purchasing this work was seen as an important first step in consolidating the institution's relations with the Penrose family, who possessed an outstanding collection of twentieth century art and who were already favourably inclined towards the SNGMA thanks to the links established

in the early years of the gallery.⁴⁴ The issues surrounding the purchase thus involved far more than the value of the single work. 'We are concerned to buy Miró's *Maternité* ... also because we have every reason to believe that Anthony Penrose will offer us other works from his collection over the years.'⁴⁵

The consequences of certain acquisitions can far outstretch the value of a single piece. The report on this proposed purchase referred to the idea of 'setting up a Scottish Centre for Dada and Surrealism', indicating that 'it had the potential of possessing a collection and a library unique in Britain, perhaps in the world.' The advantage of this was that it would provide the gallery with 'a pronounced profile; it would not be just another good museum of modern art.' It cited the example of the Rifkind Centre for German Expressionism at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, stating that 'people often look to it rather than Germany if they are interested in that field'.⁴⁶

Such a quest for a unique feature is an interesting trend within museums. There is always a need to aim for a certain level of comprehensive coverage of as many areas as possible, particularly within a national collection, but the greatest prestige is often gained from possessing a specific area of specialisation, particularly for a small-to-medium sized institution such as the SNGMA which could never hope to compete with larger international GMAs on a more comprehensive level. In this case the argument was used as a much wider justification for the purchase; it could make clear 'we are aiming not just to launch a new and exciting development for scholarship'.⁴⁷ Part of the logic underlying the desire to establish a centre for specific scholarship was that 'by playing the education card we should be able to attract money from Trusts and charities such as the Getty, Carnegie, Leverhulme and Wolfson (which has a specific fund for helping libraries)'.⁴⁸ This is an interesting reflection on the shifting

⁴⁴ The SNGMA's connection with the Penrose family dated back to the early years of Douglas Hall's Keepership, when Hall began corresponding with Roland Penrose about loans for the Klee exhibition of 1962. The relationship was further nurtured by Calvocoressi, who recognised the value of good relations with major potential donors. Major benefits have accrued from such relations; apart from Keiller and Penrose, there have been significant donations from Ken Powell, the Havinden family, and most recently the arrangements with Anthony d'Offay.

⁴⁵ Report entitled 'Funding the Acquisition of Miró's *Maternité*', attached to Minutes of 18 January 1991.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Proposal for Study Centre for Dada and Surrealism, attached to Board Room Minutes, January 1991.

role of the museum; from a primary function of display, the educational aspects have become more 'profitable', an easier field in which to access precious funds.

The problem with the purchase at that specific moment was that coincidentally the National Gallery was also faced with an exceptional purchase opportunity, a Leonardo drawing. Both were outstanding works, but the coincidence of timing made it impossible to fund them both from the central acquisition fund, which that year was set at £1,750,000. The Trustees expressed grave concerns at being, as they saw it, forced to agree to two major acquisitions by tying up funds from future years. The problem for the SNGMA was that the acquisition of the Miró meant far more than one single work: it represented access to an entire collection, and was therefore strategically essential. Calvocoressi managed to secure some funding from the NACF, and because the work had been in the country for more than fifty years, it was also eligible for a major contribution from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, which again Calvocoressi managed to secure. There was still a shortfall of £1 million, however, and the Trustees urged Calvocoressi to pursue every means possible to make up this outstanding amount. Timing proved awkward again when it was agreed, against Calvocoressi's wishes, to include the work in an exhibition celebrating the NACF's activities, entitled **Saved for the Nation**. Calvocoressi had argued that as the work had not yet been completely 'saved', it would make further fund-raising problematic if the work was shown in the exhibition. His opinion was overruled, however, and the painting was included. The purchase of *Maternité* was finally completed over several instalments with the assistance of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the NACF and donations from the public as well as funds from the purchase grant, but it had not been a straightforward process, and Calvocoressi received some sharp criticism from the Trustees, who declared that they 'expected a more positive and energetic response from him'.⁴⁹ This remark reveals a new requirement of the post; not only was the Keeper responsible for organising exhibitions, providing a high degree of connoisseurship in suggesting purchases, maintaining contact with collectors, looking after the growing collection, but he was now also expected to mount major fundraising campaigns, and was vulnerable to criticism if his fundraising skills did not show sufficient energy. As Keeper, his most lasting contribution would undoubtedly be the enrichment of the collection, but the processes now involved in doing this were much more complicated. It was no longer

⁴⁹ Board Room Minutes, September 1991.

a case of identifying an interesting work, establishing an appropriate price and requesting permission from the Trustees to proceed with the acquisition. The prices for important works of art had risen well beyond the reach of the gallery's annual purchase grant, so major acquisitions became 'campaigns', requiring time and energy on the part of the curators. It has also led to the increased role played by the Development Department within the organisation, which has brought about a considerable shift in emphasis within the structure. Today there are fewer curators at the GMA than members of other departments, comprising marketing, media, retail, fundraising, etc. Inevitably this alters the way the institution's aims and ambitions are formulated and realised, with more emphasis put on recognised business strategies. Timothy Clifford, in one annual report, reiterated the more traditional role of the curator: '... We must remember that when all else has passed away your stewardship and our connoisseurship and scholarship are going to be judged on what works of art are acquired. History will be our harshest critics.'⁵⁰ Although this remains true, the people who now play the largest part in orchestrating campaigns for major acquisitions are not trained in Art History but in Marketing. The need to engage with the commercial sphere for funding has made this inevitable. The difficulty in Edinburgh has always been the lack of companies with enough to gain from funding the arts, coupled with the impossibility of providing the visitor numbers that would entice companies from further afield to become interested. It creates a situation of further inequality with the large London-based museums, which can offer their sponsors far more benefits. It is not due to a lack of effort that sponsorship is not forthcoming, rather that there are not enough potential sponsors.

The changed approach to administrative matters can be noted in the names of the reports compiled by the Galleries, which changed from 'Financial Plan' to 'Corporate Plan' in 1991. The three Galleries were now expected to forge a common identity, not highlight their different programmes. This document set out the vision for the next five-year period. The top priority for the whole of the Galleries was 'to preserve and display the Collection for the enjoyment and education of the widest possible public', and within that, it identified preservation as the most important task. This is one of the key paradoxes for any museum. Offering broad access is central to the mission of most museums, but equally the need to preserve works in conditions that will prevent

⁵⁰ Board Paper 5(b) on Art Works, Board Room Minutes, September 1991.

damage and decay often require that works have to be kept out of reach. As Marcia Pointon notes:

National museums were founded with the principle of ‘access’ as their very *raison d’être* and yet the trusteeship principle ... ensured that these institutions would exist in a state of contradiction... This oscillation might be summed up by the powerful image of the great doors of a museum slowly swinging shut at the end of the day, imprisoning objects and excluding the visitors.⁵¹

Despite the conservation priority, however, the ambition was still to expand the audience range as far as possible. The description of proposed activities at the GMA continued to focus principally on education, but showed also the commitment to a broad curatorial programme. ‘The GMA aims to put on a lot of fairly small exhibitions in order to reflect the changing styles and schools of Modern Art. Its choice reflects its collecting policy in that it seems to represent classic modern art and contemporary art and put some emphasis on Scottish art.’⁵²

The mention of Scottish art indicates that more attention was being paid to this during the ongoing discussions about the Gallery of Scottish Art. Alongside the need to raise funds for major acquisitions in 1991, the question of the Gallery of Scottish Art was also high on the agenda. Lothian Region had offered the NGS the use of the Dean Centre on Belford Road, opposite the SNGMA. It was noted that this would provide several practical advantages, including much-needed storage for artworks and office space that would allow the organisation to rationalise its administrative offices.⁵³ The building was not considered particularly well-suited to displaying art, but there was ample space surrounding the building where an extension could be built. It was recorded in the Board Room Minutes that ‘if the NGS acquired Dean College, it should be on the firm understanding with SOED that money would be made available to build an extension’.⁵⁴ It is clear from internal memos that the NGS expected to be able to inaugurate this new gallery in the Dean Centre by 1994.⁵⁵ Timothy Clifford and the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Angus Grossart, announced the proposal publicly during the summer of 1991, immediately sparking off intense interest and debate. Opinions were mixed, with some commentators seeing it as a ‘ghetto-isation’

⁵¹ Pointon, p. 2.

⁵² Corporate Plan 1991-95, attached to Board Room Minutes, January 1991.

⁵³ These were at the time spread over various rented properties on the city centre, at considerable expense.

⁵⁴ Minutes, January 1991.

⁵⁵ The Corporate Plan 1991-95 refers to the provisional plan for the Scottish Gallery, expecting it to be ready for 1994.

of the national school, while others viewed it as a long-overdue celebration of Scotland's art.⁵⁶ In their announcement, they mentioned the Dean Centre as a possible venue, causing immediate consternation in the west of Scotland that it should be taken for granted that the proposed gallery would be located in Edinburgh. The proponents of a West of Scotland venue argued with great conviction that Glasgow had as many factors in its favour, including a rich collection of major works by Scottish artists such as Charles Rennie Mackintosh, who was barely represented in the NGS collections.⁵⁷ At the same time, the Edinburgh public was concerned at the effect that a new Gallery of Scottish Art might have on the existing Portrait Gallery. It was soon being reported that the scheme for a Gallery of Scottish Art would draw heavily on the resources of the Portrait Gallery and eventually replace its functions. Public affection for the institution of the Portrait Gallery was strong, and vociferous protests were raised rejecting any proposal involving its closure.⁵⁸ Eventually it was decided to engage the services of a consultancy firm, Piedad, to examine all options. Their report saw several disadvantages to the Dean, in particular its awkward location. Although the GMA occupied a peripheral position in these debates, the direct consequence of the protracted discussions was that no immediate solution was found for the pressing problems of storage space at the GMA.

1991 saw one important development for the GMA. The footbridge over the Water of Leith behind the gallery was finally opened in the summer, creating an alternative access route to the institution that was in total contrast to the suburban approach of the established entrance. This route allowed for pedestrian access from the Water of Leith Walkway, a local government project that had been developed during the 1980s to provide a riverside walk stretching from Balerno in the south-west of the city to the mouth of the river at Leith. The footbridge to the GMA lies on the stretch between Roseburn and the Dean village, a popular pathway used by locals and visitors. It offers a *rus in urbe* setting that provides the visitor with a different preparation for the experience of viewing art, emerging as one does from the uncultivated riverside woodland and encountering in particular the outdoor sculpture in the grounds that has

⁵⁶ The Board Room Minutes of June 1991 include a brief summary, reporting that 'inevitably' Clare Henry saw it as a scandalous Edinburgh initiative, and that it should be in Glasgow, while some London press, in particular Marina Vaizey, saw it as provincial, and a concept that went against current more universal thinking.

⁵⁷ 'Glasgow and Edinburgh clash over new gallery plan – National Gallery of Scottish Art', *The Times*, 24 August 1991.

⁵⁸ A public debate was held at Edinburgh College of Art on 18 January 1994, at which the strength of public feeling became evident. See 'Call for heads to roll', *Herald*, 19 January 1994.

always been an integral part of the institution's collection. The value of this alternative approach had already been noted by Douglas Hall, who had received old photographs indicating the existence of a pathway up from the river, and he had always intended to develop it.⁵⁹ It remains an area that could be further exploited. Initially, an intriguing artwork was commissioned from the landscape sculptor, David Nash, consisting of a scheme of tree-planting intended to form a natural gateway to the gallery. The planting went ahead, but nature proved the stronger force, as the artwork is now barely detectable within the dense growth on the hillside path. The work was, however, accompanied by delicate drawings of the proposed scheme, and these remain as an interesting record.⁶⁰ Currently the Henry Moore sculpture, which had aroused such disapproval from the Saltire Society in 1960, is placed within the glade at the top of the path, introducing the visitor to the world of modern art in a quiet yet powerful way. It can be argued that the positioning of this statue reduces the number of people who see it, as the rear entrance lies beyond the car park, and there are no signposts to help visitors find it, but this adds to the intimate experience for those who arrive from the riverbank. More recently, the route has received renewed publicity thanks to the placement of a multiple work by the sculptor, Anthony Gormley, which will be discussed in the final chapter.

Major acquisitions remained the main area of concern for the GMA throughout 1991 and 1992. As noted, Calvocoressi had faced some criticism from the Board of Trustees for his handling of the acquisition of Miró's *Maternité*, but he soon had to return with another urgent appeal. In January 1992 he presented a request to purchase another important work from the Penrose collection, Henry Moore's lead sculpture, *The Helmet*, which Antony Penrose was again offering first to the SNGMA at a favourable rate before putting it on the open market. Calvocoressi had to acknowledge that it was a very bad moment for the GMA to make such an appeal, having only just completed the Miró purchase, but he presented a forceful case for retaining this work. His reasons again provide interesting insights into precisely why institutions choose to spend enormous sums on certain works. The justifications touched on several different aspects of the work, showing how many layers of meaning are contained in a single object. He pointed out the rarity-value of the object

⁵⁹ 'I cannot exaggerate the opportunity we have to create something unique in Britain here, and to turn our distance from the city centre, in other ways a drawback, to positive advantage. The final stage of the project is the opening up of the wooded dell to the Water of Leith, with the possibility of siting an important piece of landscape-sculpture in the dell.' Future Objectives for SNGMA, 6 March 1985.

⁶⁰ The work was entitled *Sycamores, Chestnuts and Oaks above the Water of Leith* (GMA 3430)

because of the material used: ‘Being made of lead, it is extremely rare.’⁶¹ Rarity has always been a key factor in determining value, despite efforts by many twentieth century artists to undermine this by creating ‘ready-mades’ or ‘multiples’. The work also had value because of its place within the creative evolution of Moore’s oeuvre: ‘It is the origin of the helmet heads that began to appear in his work ten years later, and of the image of one form enclosed and protected by another.’ This highlights the role of early examples of work by an artist providing a clear trajectory of the development of a style: an item that can illustrate important stages of that trajectory is automatically viewed as more valuable than random, or untypical, works. Carrying on logically from this appreciation of its illustrative value, Calvocoressi used the fact of the item’s wide exposure as further proof of the prestige associated with it: ‘*The Helmet* was in Roland Penrose’s possession by June 1940 and has been exhibited in all major Moore retrospectives since, from MoMA, New York, in 1946 to the Royal Academy, London, in 1988.’ These arguments held sway with the Board, because the purchase was agreed, with support coming from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Art Fund (Scottish collection) and the Henry Moore Foundation.



Figure 20: Henry Moore, *The Helmet*

The good relationship with the Penrose family offered the institution access to an outstanding collection of twentieth century works, with an especially strong holding of Surrealist works. The combination of this, and the prospect of the Keiller bequest made the decision to focus on Surrealism an obvious one, but at times it produced awkward situations for the gallery. The Penrose family were keen to favour the

⁶¹ This and the subsequent comments are all from the document entitled ‘Acquisition proposals’, GMA Committee meeting, 13 January 1992.

SNGMA, but the works they possessed were a considerable material asset that they could need to realise at times that were not necessarily convenient for the gallery. Early in the summer of 1993, Calvocoressi had raised the prospect of more major works in the Penrose collection being offered for sale along with the family archive and library, and by November he reported to the Board that a decision would have to be made with some urgency, ‘as other institutions were interested’.⁶² The justifications for the purchase once again demonstrate the organic nature of collections: the works to be acquired are viewed from the perspective of what is already present. In describing the works by Wilfredo Lam, Calvocoressi comments: ‘... it would hang perfectly with Dubuffet, Richier...’⁶³ The comment serves as an example of the underlying strategies within collecting:

All museums rely on classification and display to give their contents coherence and meaning. Classification and arrangement are the lifeblood of any collection: collections differ from mere accumulations of objects by virtue of criteria and selection and a subsequent ordering of what is collected into meaningful categories and/or a sequence.⁶⁴

Once again, the Board’s response was not entirely approving. The Trustees recorded their objection ‘to being pressured into making decisions in a hurry’, and noted that the acquisition of the archive would ‘take the GMA in a new direction’, implying therefore that more time was needed to assess the repercussions of such a change in direction.⁶⁵ Time, however, could clearly work against them, if Penrose decided to approach other institutions that might have had more ready access to large funds. These situations reveal the bind for a smaller institution. Although it can establish closer relations with collectors, if the collection is too valuable and is then offered for sale, the problem lies in finding the resources, and ensuring that there will be adequate storage space for the new acquisitions. This is where large institutions have greater flexibility to manoeuvre. It is ironic that institutions such as museums present an image of slow, steady progress because often decisions have to be taken at very short notice, as was the case in this instance. Calvocoressi managed to juggle the needs of the Penrose family and the SNGMA for another year, until the winter of 1994, by which time another unexpected twist had occurred in the story of the institution, which would lead to the next phase of expansion.

⁶² ‘Such acquisitions would strengthen the GMA’s collection considerably and increase its international standing. On the other hand the GMA had had a considerable share of the Purchase Grant in recent years.’ Board Room Minutes, 26 November 1993.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao*, Berkeley, Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2008, p. 111.

⁶⁵ Board Room Minutes, 26 November 1993.

Balancing different displays

The exhibitions programme continued to include both international and Scottish artists. In 1992, the GMA had planned a small exhibition of works by Miró centring on *Maternité*, but in January were offered a major exhibition of his sculptures, by the Fondation Maeght. This was an exceptional opportunity, so once again the gallery had very little time to find the amount of sponsorship that a major exhibition of this sort required. An exhibition of works by the little-known Scottish artist, James Pryde, had already been planned for the summer. This had been in preparation for some time, under the care of Ann Simpson, then a junior curator. She had been working on the Pryde exhibition since 1990: it required considerable detective work, as there had been no exhibition of Pryde's since 1948, so tracking down the current location of the paintings was a challenging task. The idea for the exhibition arose in response to comments made following the **Scottish Art since 1900** exhibition, which had included four works by Pryde. The interest generated led to the idea of a more extensive show of this neglected painter's works. The planned Pryde show fulfilled many of the criteria of a National Gallery, informative and serving a patriotic purpose in re-establishing an artist who had been overlooked. In the face of competition from Miró, however, it seemed that this opportunity was to be lost. It had proved difficult to raise sponsorship for Pryde, given that he was not a well-known name, and given the difficult economic climate. The gallery had approached the London-based Merchant Bank, Robert Fleming and Co. Ltd., who held a well-known collection of Scottish art, but their reply was typical:

After some discussion we feel unable to provide sponsorship for the forthcoming exhibition of the work of James Pryde. It is very difficult for us politically to provide money for sponsorship at a time when we are telling our staff that they have to "tighten their belts" and "pull their horns in".⁶⁶

The reply sums up the inherent dilemma for sponsorship, that it tends to be needed most when it is least likely to be available. The scope of the exhibition was progressively reduced until almost no foreign loans were to be requested. The initial plan had envisaged loans from Australia, South Africa, America, and Spain, but eventually only some works from the *Musée d'Orsay* were allowed. There was even talk of abandoning the project altogether, but Simpson fought bravely to defend at

⁶⁶ Letter dated 11 July 1991. GMA A33/1/2/179/24.

least a reduced version, and in fact the exhibition went ahead to great acclaim.⁶⁷ The review in *The Spectator* stated:

It is Scottish year at Edinburgh where the visual arts are concerned... Pryde is a neglected painter. Many may know him only for the Bickerstaff posters which he made with his brother-in-law William Nicholson. John Rothenstein dismissed him in his survey of *Modern British Painters* (1952) almost as contemptuously as Plumb saw off poor Lord Bute. This exhibition at the SNGMA – the first of his work since a retrospective in 1948 – offers just the sort of experience which festivals exist to provide.⁶⁸

The *Financial Times* was equally praising: ‘In the past there have been complaints that the visual arts at the Edinburgh Festival have not sufficiently reflected the state of Scottish art past or present. This situation is handsomely redeemed this year...’⁶⁹ The positive appreciation of the attention to Scottish art can surely be seen as a vindication of the negative comments that had greeted **Scottish Art since 1900**. It seems that old prejudices about Scottish art were slowly being broken down, thanks to these exhibitions. This function of exhibitions should not be underestimated: an exhibition can have more impact on re-establishing a forgotten artist than simply acquiring one work. From this perspective, it is hard to deny that exhibitions serve a very strong purpose, and should not be overlooked when granting finance. If the function of the gallery is solely to collect, preserve and display, it will fail to wield as much influence as it would if it can also mount well-researched and well-sourced exhibitions. The example of James Pryde proves this. The exhibition was successful, the catalogue highly praised, and Pryde’s work has since appeared in several other major exhibitions, thanks to the process of re-evaluation following the exhibition.⁷⁰

The gallery held another Scottish exhibition during the winter season, this time of a contemporary artist, Callum Innes. The response to this was less favourable, at least from the point of view of the general public. One visitor wrote an irate letter: ‘That a very very small percentage of visitors to your beautiful gallery, did more than put their heads around the door, shudder, and hurry away – must surely say something of the non-impact this pretentious rubbish had on the viewer...’⁷¹ This type of comment

⁶⁷ Memo dated 6 April 1992 from Simpson: ‘As I am at the bottom of the curatorial heap I realise that the Pryde exhibition may be considered a soft target for cuts... However... I would value the opportunity to talk the issue over with you and Tim to put Mr Pryde’s case more fully.’ GMA A33/1/2/179/30.

⁶⁸ Allan Massie, ‘Pryde of Scotland’, *Spectator*, 29 August 1992.

⁶⁹ Mary Rose Beaumont, ‘The visual scene’, *Financial Times*, Arts section, 21 August 1992.

⁷⁰ ‘This is a splendid catalogue, not to be missed.’ *Books in Scotland*, no 43, Autumn 1992, p. 21.

Pryde’s work was seen more recently in **The Discovery of Spain**, at the NGS in 2009.

⁷¹ Letter dated 29 December 1992. GMA A33/1/2/181.

is perhaps inevitable with modern art: Edinburgh's audience is not unique. The gallery's reply highlighted the commitment to local art as justification for the choice.⁷² The general visitor to the SNGMA still tended not to admire the avant-garde. By this time there were several other venues in Edinburgh showing far less traditional forms of contemporary art: for example, the Fruitmarket Gallery, Collectives and Stills, as well as the various incarnations of the Demarco Gallery, but the SNGMA had not yet succeeded in attracting support from the audience that was interested in the avant-garde, because of the cautious path it adopted. The very success of the other ventures may even have hindered the gallery, by allowing it to cede responsibility for showing the more challenging art to those institutions specifically dedicated to it. As a strategy, this could only delay indefinitely any stronger engagement from the general public, and maintain the SNGMA's reputation for conservatism.

The tension about finding exhibition sponsorship reached its apex for the very ambitious exhibition of 1994, **The Romantic Spirit in German Art: 1790 – 1990**. This exhibition set out not only 'to reassess our idea of what modernism is (and when it began) but to show the full story of German art this century.'⁷³ In the early preparation stages, it had seemed likely that a sponsor could be found. The recently-appointed Dianne Stein, who was responsible for finding exhibition sponsorship, had not anticipated any cause for concern: 'The exhibition for 1994 promises to be sensational and we are now finalising the proposal which has in fact been floated before a sponsor. German Romantic Art, an exhibition which will take over the whole of the GMA building, will be spectacular.'⁷⁴ In fact, this proved prematurely optimistic, and the exhibition did not attract any sponsorship. The exhibition was a critical success, enhancing the GMA's reputation for serious scholarship, with Hartley authoring the weighty catalogue and reinforcing his reputation as an expert on German art. However, it had incurred far greater expense than foreseen, inflicting

⁷² 'As Scotland's NG of MA one of our roles is to show the work of what we consider the best of twentieth century Scottish art. During the Festival we showed James Pryde, who flourished in the early part of the century. We have recently shown the work of Peplow, McCance and Baird, but also contemporary artists such as John Bellany, Stephen Conroy, Ken Currie, Gwen Hardie and many more besides. We have to show the latest developments of Scottish art as well as the more established. All the young artists we show, such as Callum Innes, have already a good track record of exhibitions behind them.

We realise that not all our exhibitions, nor all the works in our collection, will please everyone. We try to show a variety of things, in order to reflect the diversity of art this century.' Letter from Keith Hartley, 13 January 1993. GMA A33/1/2/181.

⁷³ 'Proposed exhibition', in SNGMA Minutes, 2 July 1993.

⁷⁴ Report on Sponsorship, with Board Room Minutes, July 1993.

a major overspend on the Galleries generally. Despite the financial consequences, Clifford was not too displeased: 'I believe it is an essential part of the Gallery's educative role to mount well-researched, challenging exhibitions of material that may not always be familiar to, or indeed instantly popular with, the general public.'⁷⁵ As a result, however, stricter controls were put in place to prevent unauthorised overspending. This created a certain amount of friction with other galleries. The GMA felt that it was operating at some disadvantage with respect to sponsorship. Much of the art they wanted to show was either not well known or controversial, therefore less immediately appealing to major firms, most of whom preferred to be associated with exhibitions of safer, well-known names. It was difficult to find subjects that would guarantee large audiences unless they restricted their exhibitions to the most popular artists or movements, but this would be failing in the mission to extend the public's understanding and appreciation of more difficult art. The tension between striving for popularity and stretching the boundaries was even stronger once the need for commercial sponsorship was introduced. The Trustees' determination to manage finances more carefully became evident the following year. Anticipating that sponsorship might be difficult to obtain for a forthcoming exhibition of London-based painters, Calvocoressi requested permission to draw upon the Treaty of Union fund should no sponsor be found.⁷⁶ This request met with a somewhat accusatory response from the Chairman of the Trustees. He referred to a 'failure to learn from the deficit on the German Romantic exhibition', and insisted that: 'The GMA must work harder at attracting audiences and winning sponsorship and not expect the other Galleries to support them.'⁷⁷

During the discussions about the Scottish Gallery, the idea of the SNGMA developing its Surrealist collection was viewed favourably 'as likely to establish a more distinctive identity for the SNGMA within an international context, especially if most of the SNGMA's Scottish pictures were to be transferred to the new Gallery.'⁷⁸ It is clear that the identity of the SNGMA would have been radically affected if the Scottish Gallery had become a reality. The multiple functions it has always tried to balance would have shifted towards a much more predominantly international focus:

⁷⁵ Report on Romantic Spirit in German Art, with Board Room Minutes, July 1993.

⁷⁶ The Treaty of Union Annuity was the original fund set up under the Treaty of Union of 1707 (see p. 13, note 32). It is now an unrestricted trust fund that can be used by any of the three galleries for unspecified purposes. I am grateful to Richard Calvocoressi for kindly clarifying this comment.

⁷⁷ Board Room Minutes, March 1995

⁷⁸ Board Room Minutes, March 1991.

one might conjecture that the eagerness to develop a specific field of international relevance grew alongside an awareness that the inherent 'special collection' that it had always held in its Scottish works might no longer be housed within its walls. The effect of the Scottish Gallery proposals was far-reaching despite the fact that no concrete solution was ever found.

At the same time it is interesting to notice how many Scottish-related exhibitions had been held since the proposals first arose about forming a separate Gallery of Scottish Art. The GMA had always had reservations about dividing the 20th century collection, and the series of exhibitions they held during the early 1990s perhaps indicated their eagerness to retain control over the works of the modern period, allowing them to continue to show Scottish works within the wider frame of international art. The debates about the Scottish Gallery had raged long and hard from the moment the proposals were announced. During the discussions about moving most of the works by Scottish artists to Glasgow, the GMA raised many questions about the anomalies that might arise, such as the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art no longer having works by the greatest Scottish artists on display. The Pidea consultancy report had found advantages and disadvantages with all the proposed options, but in the end Clifford and Grossart had decided that the benefits accruing from the creation of a new institution in the west of Scotland outweighed those of locating it in the Dean Centre, and this was communicated to Councillor Eric Milligan during the summer of 1994. Shortly after this disappointment for the Councillor, who had been eager to find a good use for the prestigious building, another possible solution presented itself. The locally-born, internationally renowned sculptor, Edoardo Paolozzi, proposed gifting the entire contents of his London studio to Edinburgh. Such a gift would be difficult to accept unless further space could be found, and with this in mind, Milligan wrote to the Chairman of the Trustees:

... over the past year perhaps my biggest disappointment has been the failure of the Edinburgh Partnership to convince you and your colleagues of the benefits of siting the NG of Scottish Art at the Dean Centre... Nevertheless, you will know from previous work undertaken by this Authority of the architectural merits of the Dean Centre building and its outstanding locational aspects.... With the prospect of Local Government Reorganisation on the horizon, it is becoming critical that we either realize its potential for future use as an arts venue which would benefit not only Edinburgh and Lothian Region but Scotland as a whole, or consider other courses of action.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Letter to Angus Grossart, 6 September 1994. Dean Centre Economic Appraisal, March 1995: Dean Conversion Files.

This statement makes clear that the driving consideration was the need to find a use for this large, prestigious building, not a specific commitment to modern art. The Council liked the idea of using the Dean as an ‘arts venue’, regardless of the precise form it would take. They needed to give the building a function, and the most obvious function was as a gallery. They were not looking at Edinburgh’s needs and identifying a lack of gallery space, simply recognising that the building had few other possible uses. The local and national connection through Paolozzi made it easier to justify.



Figure 21: The Dean Centre

The conjunction of the Paolozzi gift and the offer of additional space made the proposal more tempting. It occurred at a particularly sensitive moment for the GMA. At the same Board Meeting on 25 November 1994, Calvocoressi had to present the case for committing to the purchase of the Penrose collection, which would have a strong impact on the future shape of the collection, and also respond to the offer of the Paolozzi gift coupled with the repeated offer of the Dean Centre. He expressed enthusiasm for the proposed Paolozzi gift, referring to it as ‘a gift which happened once in a century, a double gift that would allow the NGS to display the products and process of working demonstrated in a sculptor’s life and career’. The Chairman warned caution, expressing doubt about the chance of finding any government money to support the project, given the other projects still under discussion, including the Scottish Gallery in Glasgow and the refurbishment programme for the RSA building

that was much needed. However, this proved overly pessimistic, because the Secretary of State for Scotland announced in March 1995 that he would fund the necessary alterations at the Dean centre to convert it into the Paolozzi Gallery.

The connections between these events and the eventual purchase of the Penrose collection are strong. Each drew strength from the developments in the others; the Paolozzi gift justified the extension into the Dean, and the extra space that was provided by this extension allowed for the development of the well-structured Surrealism centre that had been proposed for some time. The initial concept of the Paolozzi Gallery had aroused considerable controversy. Was it appropriate for a national institution to enhance the reputation of one living artist over others, and did Paolozzi deserve such a unique accolade?⁸⁰ It became obvious that it might be beneficial to extend the proposed gallery's remit beyond showing the work of one artist. Paolozzi had been a favourite artist of Gabrielle Keiller; she had acquired many works of his. His work fell into the category of Pop Art, which many saw as a direct descendant of Surrealism. It made sense to extend the initial programme for the proposed new gallery at the Dean to include the Surrealist works that formed the Keiller collection, and that made up the main part of the Penrose collection. The prospect of acquiring these collections had already been recognised as problematic for display, and the idea of housing them in a separate gallery focussing on Surrealism more generally was a welcome one. The highly fortuitous inauguration of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in 1994 provided a new major source of funding, and the acquisition of the Penrose collection by the SNGMA was the first ever use of the HLF for works of art. £3 million was awarded for the purchase of 26 works from the Penrose family, with a further £1 million provided by the National Art Collections Fund (NACF) and the gallery's own purchase grant. The Lottery award was announced in August 1995, and was greeted with positive comments in the press.⁸¹ The timing was fortunate, because only a few months earlier, the Director had had to

⁸⁰ For example, an article entitled 'Paolozzi's Pride' in *The Sunday Times*, 1 December 1996, reported the views of several important figures from the Scottish artistic establishment who were opposed to the concept, including Ian Hamilton Finlay, who was quoted as saying: 'The idea of establishing a national memorial to a living artist appals me. It is extraordinary and wrong.' Julian Spalding, former Director of Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries, was also critical: 'That an ageing artist should wish to create a monument to himself is understandable, but for the authorities in Edinburgh to accept so readily a living artist's estimation of himself suggests not responsibility to the nation they serve, but opportunism or dereliction of duty.'

⁸¹ John Russell Taylor, 'Mad dress and Englishmen', *The Times*, 22 August, 1995: 'Thanks to the National Art Collections Fund and the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Gallery has been able to acquire 26 Dada and surrealist paintings and drawings from the collection of Sir Roland Penrose, the finest surrealist collection in this country, public or private.'

report that the government had cut the purchase grant by £½ million, the first of a series of cuts that reduced the NGS budget drastically over the next few years.⁸²

The decision to proceed with the Paolozzi Gallery at the Dean had already been taken before the successful conclusion of the Penrose acquisition was announced. The terms negotiated with the Scottish Executive were for quite a restricted programme: the gallery was to be open for only six months a year, and most of the building was to be used for offices and storage. The original scheme for the Paolozzi Gallery envisaged a stand-alone operation, not an integrated element of the SNGMA. In 1996, however, while the conversion work was proceeding, the HLF announced that it wanted to focus its attention on museums and galleries for the coming year, and invited applications from that sector. Given the recent acquisition of the Penrose collection, and the arrival of the works from the Keiller bequest following the death of Gabrielle Keiller in 1995, and given the long-held intention to establish a Surrealist Study Centre, the idea began to take hold of applying for additional funding to cover an 'enhanced scheme' of conversion. This could highlight the advantages of integrating the two sites and developing a wider programme for the newly acquired building. The acquisition of the Penrose archive and library added to the potential uses of the Dean, and these ideas were elaborated into a successful Lottery application, submitted in the summer of 1996. The question of location was still at the heart of the proposal:

A key factor in the success of any attraction is its location and accessibility as well as the visual impact of the site. Although the location of the Dean is within the City of Edinburgh and thus benefits from the city's strong cultural credentials, the building is outwith the main city centre and therefore visits to the area would, generally speaking, be pre-planned, with relatively few casual visits from passing customers. However, more positively, its location and proposed connection with the GMA will add to the profile of the area, critical mass and greater scope on marketing opportunities. We regard the synergistic effect of the two galleries as very significant in increasing the significance of the site and thus its appeal to all classes of visitors.⁸³

The hope was that having two attractions would create enough synergy to increase the public's attendance at the awkwardly liminal location, neither fully in the city centre nor completely outside of it. The need therefore to unite the two sites was critical: this was to be achieved through the development of 'Scotland's first urban sculpture

⁸² Director's Report, 21 January – 17 March 1995.

⁸³ Report prepared by The Edinburgh Consultancy: 'Dean Centre – Paolozzi Gallery, Supplementary Submissions on behalf of the National Galleries of Scotland to the Heritage Lottery Fund December 1996', p. 6. Dean Conversion Files: Box 3.

park'. In February 1997, the HLF announced that they would provide an additional £6.3m to convert the Dean into an integrated component of the SNGMA, housing both the Paolozzi gift and the Dada and Surrealist Study Centre, comprising a new Reference Library and with space for additional temporary exhibitions. The architects already engaged for the 'base scheme', Terry Farrell and Partners, adapted their plans, and work proceeded for the 'enhanced conversion'.

'Almost imperceptibly ... a world player in 20th century art'

The Keiller bequest instigated a move towards specialisation in Surrealism, but the gallery's collection had other areas of strength that were not neglected. Andrew Gibbon Williams had noticed this in 1991: 'One of the most heartening consequences of Richard Calvocoressi's directorship of the SNGMA is that the gallery has begun to recognise its strengths and proceeded to capitalise upon them; in short, it has ceased to be a higgledy-piggledy pot-pourri of modernism. The collection is particularly rich in 20th c. German expressionism...' ⁸⁴ The observation was largely accurate: the collection had, as noted, taken an earlier interest in German works than other British institutions like the Tate. ⁸⁵ This was partly due to the more accessible prices for these works in the early years, but the personal preferences of the curators were also relevant. Douglas Hall's interest in all art that explored themes of humanity encouraged his interest in Expressionism generally, and later the arrival of Hartley, a fluent German speaker, continued this trend. Hartley took a close interest in German art, as seen in his work for the exhibition **The Romantic Spirit in German Art**, one of the most ambitious exhibitions ever mounted by the GMA. Calvocoressi shared this strong interest in German art: his first major purchase for the institution was the sculpture *The Terrible Year: 1937* (GMA 3036) by the German sculptor, Ernst Barlach.

In 1997 the gallery achieved another *coup* following its purchase of four early works by the Scottish painter, Alan Davie. The artist himself then donated a further 27 works, as a gesture of goodwill towards the gallery, thanking the institution for

⁸⁴ Andrew Gibbon Williams, 'Brilliant Abstractions', in *The List*, 14-27 June 1991, p. 61.

⁸⁵ The comment is frequently made by staff at SNGMA that the acquisition of Kirchner's *Japanisches Theater* in 1965 was 'fifteen years ahead of the Tate', and was repeated at a talk in the NGS given by the three Directors, Hall, Calvocoressi and Groom in August 2010.

showing support for his work. The purchase had been made possible with help from the HLF, and was the first occasion that this body had contributed to the purchase of works by a living artist. Once again, the gallery's judicious approach to acquisitions had reaped benefits that far outstripped the cost. In his report covering the period, Clifford referred to the Davie gift alongside the Keiller bequest, commenting:

‘Almost imperceptibly over the last decade the GMA has become a world player in twentieth century art, and much credit is due to the Keeper and his staff.’⁸⁶

Calvocoressi's first ten years in the post had seen the gallery develop a targeted strategy that had allowed it to focus its attention on those areas where it was most likely to achieve success, in particular the decision to pursue the idea of a Surrealist study centre. Calvocoressi had found the foundations for this strategy already in place, with the good relations already established with Gabrielle Keiller and Roland Penrose, but he had shown clarity of vision and purpose in carrying this strategy through to execution. The early years of his tenure were blessed with the inauguration of the National Lottery. This opened up a major source of funding, both for acquisitions, as in the Penrose collection and the Davie works, but also for capital projects, as seen in the enhanced scheme for the Dean redevelopment. Calvocoressi had seized the opportunity that this new source provided, and made excellent use of its potential, indeed turning the institution into ‘a world player in twentieth century art’. By choosing to build on strengths rather than continue aiming for comprehensive coverage of the art of the century, the gallery was able to carve a distinct identity for itself, and establish a field in which it ranks as world class. That the area chosen was Surrealism has proven rewarding, as it allows for so many connections with other movements that have developed since.

During the early 1990s, attention was focussed on acquiring various components of the Penrose collection, including the library and archives, all directly related to the ambition for a Surrealist centre. Once this was finalised, and preparations were underway for the conversion of the Dean to house the centre, the gallery once again re-assessed its policy on collecting. Like so many previous versions of this policy statement, it opened by commenting on ‘the unprecedented rise in prices for classic modern and contemporary art’. This had been a constant refrain since the first policy document was prepared by David Baxandall in 1958. The report continued by recording how successful the institution had been at fulfilling its ambition to

⁸⁶ Director's Report, 19 May – 18 July 1997.

represent ‘most of the major artists and movements of the twentieth century with important pieces’, listing the major works acquired up to 1990.⁸⁷ The list gave a brief overview of the collection, and demonstrated how widely the collection now ranged, but acknowledged that there were still significant gaps that would be very difficult to fill. It suggested that a ‘more focussed approach’ was now required. The imminent opening of the new gallery marked a significant moment for the institution, and required them to consider how best to proceed. Having made a clear commitment to Surrealism, the gallery now had to decide how much further they should invest in this area:

The opening of the new Gallery gives us an opportunity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of our collections and to judge whether our Dada and Surrealist holdings are now sufficiently broad and deep to draw a line under our present collecting policy. The arguments for continuing – at least to finish off what we began – are compelling.⁸⁸

The compelling arguments included the advantageous purchasing conditions, particularly the option to spread the payments over several years, which were not possible for works acquired on the open market. The gallery was already in the process of trying to acquire some other works from the Penrose collection, in particular Miró’s *Head of a Catalan Peasant*, Picasso’s *Portrait of Lee Miller* and Picasso’s *Woman Lying in the Sun*. The last was especially desirable because of its versatility within the collection: ‘It is a marvellous work – witty and provocative – and clearly shows Picasso’s links with the Surrealist movement. It could be hung in several contexts in our Gallery – Picasso, Penrose, Surrealism, images of women.’ A work that can perform a role in a variety of contexts provides better value for an institution than one which represents a single concept. This explains why artists who operate outside of generally accepted canons are less represented in public collections.

⁸⁷ ‘It acquired works by Arp, Balthus, Bonnard, Braque, Delaunay, Derain, Dix, Dubuffet, Duchamp, Ernst, Feininger, Freud, Gabo, Giacometti, Goncharova, Hepworth, Hockney, Hodler, Jawlensky, Kirchner, Klee, Kokoschka, Larionov, Leger, Lichtenstein, Magritte, Man Ray, Matisse, Miro, Mondrian, Moore, Nicholson, Nolde, Picasso, Popova, Rosso, Roualt, Schwitters, Soutine and Vuillard. Fauvism, Cubism, Expressionism, Constructivism, Dada, Surrealism, Neue Sachlichkeit, Minimalism and Conceptualism were all represented in the collection. However, significant gaps still remained to be filled. Vlaminck, Gris, de Chirico, Dali, Brancusi, Boccioni, Chagall, Schiele, Hopper, Malevich, Rodchenko, Tatlin, de Kooning, Rothko and Bacon were not represented at all in the collection (although Bacon and Dali were subsequently acquired) and Munch, Klimt, Ensor, Kandinsky, Lissitzky, Beckmann and Pollock were represented only by works on paper. Futurism was not covered at all and Abstract Expressionism in its American form could not be properly understood since we only had a few small works on paper.’ Draft Collecting Policy for the Gallery of Modern Art, 1998, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

The report argued primarily in favour of completing the task of creating a centre of excellence for Surrealism, but strongly recommended supplementing this with more attention to contemporary art:

By concentrating the rest of our resources on acquiring works made recently (a moveable feast in the world of contemporary art, but for our purposes it should probably mean the last thirty years), we can make better use of our money and, if we buy judiciously, stand to build up a significant collection for the future. We also have an almost unique opportunity of acquiring and commissioning major pieces of sculpture for the combined grounds of the GMA and Dean. Very few museums of modern art have this advantage.⁸⁹

It noted, however, that there was still ‘a lot of catching up to do’ because ‘we missed out on some of the most significant artists of the 70s and 80s’. It seems that the process of ‘catching up’ with the recent past is almost inevitable: no one is ever able to predict precisely which artists will rise to the status of ‘canonical’, or will continue to resonate in the future.⁹⁰

The artists on this list were divided into two sections, with top priority given to the ‘older (or dead) artists’, specifically Andy Warhol and Gerhard Richter, while the most desirable ‘young established artists’ were named as Damien Hirst, Rachel Whiteread and Gary Hume.⁹¹ A work by Andy Warhol was estimated to cost around £1m, and Gerhard Richter at between £400,000 and £800,000. Warhol’s work had proved far more durable than the artist himself had claimed. If his work had been acquired earlier, it would have cost much less, but, in the classic manner of waiting for ‘the test of time’, it had increased in value out of reach. This meant that the Gallery was caught in a vicious circle: if it still needed to collect the recent ‘great masters’, it would constantly be in the process of ‘catching up’.

Scottish art was covered in a separate section, reiterating its distinct field within the institution. Scottish art was the only area where ‘the aim would be not only to acquire

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 4.

⁹⁰ Howard N. Fox cites the example of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and its failure to collect feminist, Chicano or African-American art during the 1960s and 70s: ‘No historical account today of the 1960s and 70s art in the United States would fail to address these important developments; yet at the time, LACMA did not act to represent them in its collection.’ Howard N. Fox, ‘The Right to be Wrong’ in Bruce Altshuler (ed.), *Collecting the New*, (Princeton; Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 19.

⁹¹ The artists in the second priority category were Antony Caro (possibly an outdoor work), Sigmar Polke, Anselm Kiefer, Tony Cragg (possibly an outdoor work) and Richard Deacon (possibly an outdoor work). The predominance of artists whose work could be shown outdoors highlights the Gallery’s awareness of its unique opportunity to display such works.

major works ... but from most if not all the stages of their development.’⁹² For local art, therefore, the expectation was for a more comprehensive coverage, not simply a selection of interesting examples. In this it would be performing a duty that no other institution would, giving it a unique status based on its national collection. The report expressed general satisfaction with the success achieved in the Scottish collection, where the most striking absence was of works by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, although there were also shortages in the holdings of certain others. Again the main ambition for the Scottish collection was to focus on contemporary Scottish artists both young and established, mentioning specifically William Turnbull, Douglas Gordon and Christine Borland. All of these proposals became easier to assess once the move into the Dean had taken place.

⁹² Draft Collecting Policy, p.5.

CHAPTER 5

The Dean Gallery

Surreal spaces

The new Gallery was finally ready to open to the public in March 1999. The press reports were very positive, admiring the brave decorative choices, and the quality of the works on display:

The total impact is impressive - a veritable treasure trove of modern art contained within a revitalised Hamilton building. Unusual in concept as galleries go, I was sceptical about some of its egocentric aspects but the reality is better than I expected. The mix will hopefully prove popular with the public. But its long-term significance comes from a rich cross-referencing of authentic surrealist masterpieces and its archival resource material - all with a perfect, unquestionable, and immaculate provenance.¹



Figure 22: Interior of the Dean Gallery

¹ Clare Henry, 'A masterpiece in its own right', *The Herald*, 29 March 1999.

The timing coincided with a wealth of cultural initiatives throughout Edinburgh that together were seen to signal a renaissance in cultural affairs, lending the occasion an optimism that had not always accompanied major initiatives of the gallery. The Scottish Poetry Library of 1999, and the Museum of Scotland, opened in 1998, were new-build projects that had found space within the dense fabric of the city centre, while the Dean was a conversion of a historic structure close to the city centre. These cultural projects generated much public interest and a positive response. The general cultural climate therefore felt buoyant, which seemed to augur well for the future. The event was reported as far afield as the New York Times, indicating the status the organisation had achieved, but also demonstrating the intense interest in cultural matters worldwide.²

Iain Gale's account highlighted the felicitous combination of architecture and content:

The Dean building sits squarely on a gentle slope of land in Edinburgh's leafy West End - its majestic Ionic portico and facade topped somewhat incongruously by the twin pavilions of some fantasy palazzo. And, if ever a building was suited to its content this surely is the case at the Dean, whose wonderfully exuberant architecture sets the tone for the visitor for the confrontation of the classic and bizarre which is the essence of this new jewel in the National Galleries' crown.³

Knowing in advance the content of the museum had allowed the architects to exploit certain themes and to tailor the conversion to suit the contents: the architectural frame harmonised with the art on display. Timothy Clifford referred to it in his Director's Report as:

... one of the signal achievements made by the NGS in their century and a half of history.... The approach to the display of 20th century paintings, sculpture, prints, books and photographs – juxtaposed with ethnographica and *objets trouvés* – although attempted in exhibitions (and common to private collections, and especially those of the artists themselves) – is revolutionary in the context of a permanent gallery.⁴

Coming from Clifford, whose interventions at the NGS had transformed it into the quintessential 'country house' style of gallery, the remark might be dismissed as confirming his predilection for sumptuous and colourful interiors. It could be argued, however, that there was a stronger connection here between the decorative scheme

² *New York Times*, 14 March 1999: 'Edinburgh, Scotland's stateliest city, is already known as a center for some of Britain's finest collections of art. Among its most distinguished museums are the three National Galleries.... Starting on March 27, there is to be a fourth, the Dean Gallery.'

³ Iain Gale, 'How surreal is this?', *Scotland on Sunday*, 28 March 1999.

⁴ Director's Report, 16 March – 16 May 1999.

and the works on display. The design was intended to add to the aesthetic experience in a way that should match the spirit of specific art works. Like Clifford's scheme at the NGS, the atmosphere was created through a simulated decorative scheme, but in the case of Surrealism, this added another layer of meaning to the displays. The experience of viewing the art was made more complete by the evocative surroundings; it provided a richer sensory experience than was offered by the neutral container principle that had governed the conversion of the John Watson building. This was in line with a wider shift in attitudes to artistic display, towards 'experiencing' the art in a meaningful context rather than simply viewing it in a supposedly neutral space.⁵

The design of the interior was well received. The building's inherent flamboyance was heightened by the decorative scheme, and the works displayed were enhanced by the rich context. The colour scheme – an intense blue in the corridor and mustard yellow in the stairwells – rejected the white-cube aesthetic of Modernist museums. The upper galleries were left as standard flexible empty spaces capable of receiving exhibitions of all kinds, but the ground floor offered a variety of dramatic architectural spaces. The Paolozzi studio was situated at one end of the corridor. It consisted of a reconstruction of the sculptor's London studio, complete with original furniture and all the ephemera essential to his work. The status of this room is difficult to determine: is it an artistic installation, or a documentary record of the artist's working environment, or a pastiche reconstruction? Richard Calvocoressi even wrote to the artist to request some articles of clothing to increase the simulation of his presence.⁶ The ambiguity adds to the viewer's experience of the artist's production, creating a surreal overlap between artifice and reality.

⁵ Clifford's redecoration of the NGS became a case study for the 'country house' approach to museum displays, but also interventions such as the Sainsbury wing in London's National Gallery were important for re-creating a setting that highlighted the 'aura' of works such as Medieval altarpieces. See Emma Barker and Anabel Thomas, 'The Sainsbury Wing and beyond: the National Gallery today', in Emma Barker (ed.) *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, New Haven; London: Yale University Press in association with The Open University, 1999, pp. 73-101.

⁶ Letter to Paolozzi, 11 February 1999. 'Also – and I hope this doesn't sound silly – do you have any old clothes that you would be prepared to relinquish, for the sleeping area/platform that Nick Gorse has designed? We are anxious to give the room a lived-in feeling, as if the artist had just stepped outside for a breather...' Dean Conversion Files: Box 3.



Figure 23: Paolozzi studio

An equally artificial, although less dramatically spectacular, simulation of a real space was to be found at the other end of the corridor. The Keiller library occupied the final room there, and was a period-style reproduction of a private library, fitted with cabinets and display cases. This was to be used for exhibitions of archival material or artists' books, with the simulated library setting again intended to enrich the display: the dark walls and heavy furnishings here can at times overwhelm the delicate material exhibited, but the decoration successfully evokes the spirit of a Cabinet of Curiosities. The first room to greet visitors on entering the building was the Great Hall. To prevent this first space in the museum remaining a small, cramped room, the architects opted to remove the ceiling and create an impressive double-height space with a narrow corridor above providing a viewing gallery. The Trustees had conceded to Clifford's suggestion to commission a work from Paolozzi, and the sculptor had produced **Vulcan** (GMA 4285), a monumental figure of the Roman god of fire, made from welded steel, and stretching to the full double-height of the space.

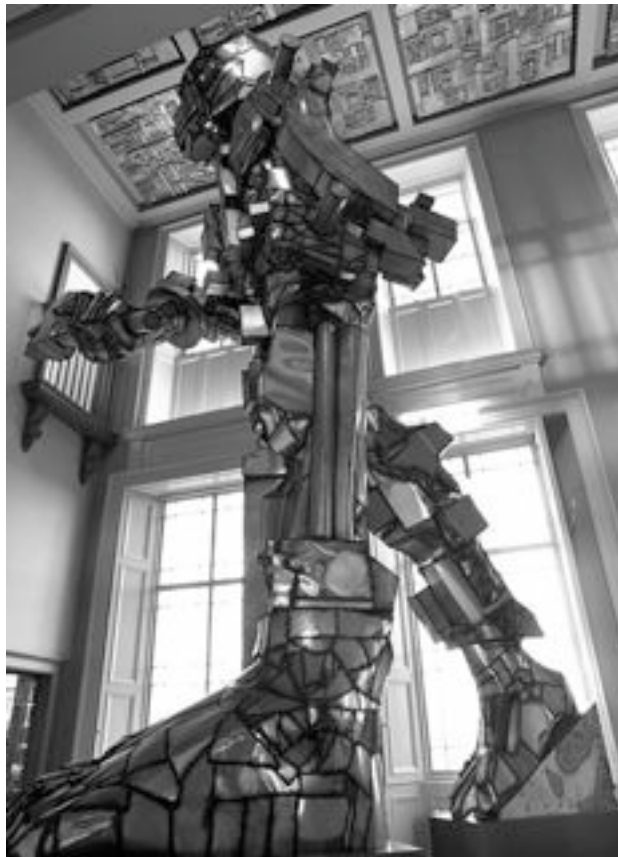


Figure 24: Edoardo Paolozzi, *Vulcan*

The statue had caused some controversy both within the institution, and with the HLF, causing all work to be suspended in the final stages of the project.⁷ In November 1998, Jane Stancliffe, the appointed Lottery administrator for the Dean application, wrote:

... when the grant was awarded, the area recently destined for the Paolozzi sculpture was indicated as a reception/orientation area as well as an area for corporate entertaining. Therefore if the latest proposals are pursued it appears you will be in breach of grant. The sculpture's presence may impact not only on the historical integrity of the space, on circulation in the Centre generally but also on the viability of the Business Plan (because of loss of corporate entertaining possibilities).⁸

This comment throws light on the difficult balancing act required to satisfy both the artistic and the commercial programme envisaged for the space. The commissioning of the sculpture was an artistic-driven decision, but it created conflict with the agreed commercial prospects for the space. Disapproval also extended to the plans for a

⁷ The commission raised some controversy with the Trustees, who felt they had not been kept informed of the progress of the work. When they saw the proposed model, they insisted on some modifications, and introduced stricter regulations on commissioning major works. 'The model of the statue commissioned from Paolozzi ... was displayed and there followed a lengthy debate on its merits. Trustees had a number of reservations which were fully discussed.' Board Room Minutes, July 1998.

⁸ Fax from Jane Stancliffe to Richard Calvocoressi, 3 November 1998. Dean Conversion File. Box 9.

special garden to be designed by Paolozzi, and the administrators halted any further work proceeding on the garden. At such a late stage, this presented an enormous problem for the GMA: they knew that unless work began on landscaping the grounds immediately, they would not be able to have them ready for the opening, scheduled for March 1999. This date had already been pushed back, but arrangements were now in place for the grand opening ceremony, and for the inaugural exhibition of works by the German photographer, Andreas Gursky. In a repeat of circumstances surrounding the move into John Watson's, contingency plans had to be formulated in case the new space was not ready. Fortunately, the impasse was broken by the middle of November, with permission given to proceed with the essential landscaping of the grounds, although not the planned garden. It still proved to be a tight schedule, however, that risked undermining the professionalism of the SNGMA. The Gursky exhibition was to be sponsored by BMW Financial Services, the third sponsorship agreement undertaken by the German company. In February, Calvocoressi felt obliged to warn them that the car park might not be functioning by the date of the corporate event BMWFS were hosting. The reply was succinct: BMWFS were not happy at the prospect of hosting an event where parking would not be available.⁹ Arrangements with sponsors require careful attention to detail and to timing: it is not surprising that the Development Department has expanded so much to address these needs.

The statue of **Vulcan**, which had generated such conflict with the HLF, was eventually paid for with a contribution from the Scottish government and with help from the Patrons. Most critics appreciated it as an interesting figure, especially given the different perspectives of it from the two levels, on the ground floor and on the specially-created first-floor corridor. The viewing gallery also allows the visitor a closer look at another Paolozzi work, the ceiling he had created for Cleish Castle, which the gallery had been given after alterations were carried out on the room where it had originally been placed. The plan to use the space for corporate events did not materialise, and the room lacked any specific function: it has recently been incorporated into the café space. The café was in fact the only area of the original conversion that caused immediate problems. The architect, Terry Farrell had insisted

⁹ A fax from Victoria Dickie marked 'Urgent' referred to a letter from Wendy Stephenson of BMWFS, and asked, 'Is there any way we can guarantee that a part of the car park will be available for parking for, say 80 cars for that night. It will save a lot of heads if we can.' 17 March 1999. Dean Conversion File. Box 9.

on placing a plaster cast of Paolozzi's *Master of the Universe* sculpture in the centre of the café, with seating arranged around it. This created a dramatic centrepiece, but was impractical for accommodating customers. Neither the Gallery staff nor the café proprietor had been convinced, and within a few months had insisted on removing it.¹⁰ What is interesting to note about the problem was how much attention it received: it was discussed at considerable length in several Board meetings. The explanation for this lies partly in the expectation of revenue generated by the café, but also in the significant role played by gallery cafés in enhancing the visitor experience. The particular location of the Dean made the success of the café even more crucial, as the institution hoped to offer a complete package of art and leisure pursuits combined, all provided on site as there were no other facilities on the area. It is impossible to ignore the need to provide a rounded experience for the visitor, which must extend beyond the simple viewing of art. A recent briefing note pointed out that 'the Belford Road campus has the highest number of destination visitors coming specifically for the café'.¹¹ The most controversial example of a gallery exploiting the attraction of its café over its own treasures was the V & A, who in the late 1980s ran an advertising campaign with the slogan, "An ace caff with quite a nice museum attached". The controversy then centred mainly on the balance between the functions required of the museum: as a centre for education and spiritual enrichment against a place of entertainment and leisure.¹² There is less tension between the two aspects today, as the expectations of a more rounded visitor experience have prevailed.

Although there was widespread approval for the conversion work that had been carried out on the building, some commentators expressed reservations about the programme that it offered. In Clare Henry's lengthy review, she admitted that her initial reservations had been overturned by the final product. Her only criticism was of the opening exhibition of works by German photographer, Andreas Gursky: 'Pathetic to inaugurate an important new space with the sterile work of a German

¹⁰ Letter from Robert Galbraith to Duncan Whatmore at Farrell's, 6 April 2000: 'We urgently need your revised thoughts on the café. Our Trustees are very clear that the existing arrangements are insufficiently flexible and that the Paolozzi figure should be removed.' Dean Conversion File: Box 9.

¹¹ Briefing Note for Meeting of Curators, Education, Communications and Trading, 26 October 2010.

¹² Joanthan Glancey discussed the question in 'Is it a café? No, it's visual clutter': 'Ever since the V&A found itself at the centre of a storm in a teacup with its Saatchi-devised "An ace caff with quite a nice museum attached" campaign of 1988, museums have taken over where the 18th-century coffee house left off. More than mere icing on the cake, they have become the bread and butter (or perhaps that should be ciabatta and olive oil) of many visits. Tate Modern feeds many whose appetite for contemporary art is possibly less than that for spring lamb. And coffee.' *Guardian*, 7 April 2004.

artist, even for a gallery known for its predilection for German art'.¹³ Originally Calvocoressi had intended showing an exhibition of works by young Scottish artists to inaugurate the space. This might have done more to satisfy local critics, but the decision had been taken not to proceed with that proposal: 'It was felt that such an exhibition, on top of all the work involved in getting the building ready on time, would be too much to handle and the Trustees favoured a display of permanent collection works'.¹⁴ The remark is reminiscent of the Trustees' attitude to the inaugural exhibition at Belford Road, perhaps demonstrating the difference in approach from those whose involvement with art is occasional and non-professional. On this occasion, it made more sense to inaugurate what was being billed as temporary exhibition space with a temporary exhibition, given that the rest of the building contained works from the permanent collection of Surrealism. Importing an exhibition generated elsewhere, however, was perhaps the wrong signal. Laura Cumming in *The Observer* expressed similar reservations about the exhibition programme. She too was not happy at the choice of Andreas Gursky to inaugurate the exhibition space, accusing the institution (and indeed the city more generally) of slavishly choosing to show artists who had already achieved fame in other major centres:

Edinburgh remains in thrall to worldly notions of success, opening its gallery doors especially wide to those who have succeeded elsewhere, preferably in London. For all the fanfares announcing the new Scottish Parliament at Holyrood, Edinburgh is still sporadically subject to cultural cringe. Maybe that's why a Union Jack flies above Clifford's stunning new museum and not a Saltire.¹⁵

The criticism went against the mood of general optimism at Scotland's apparent cultural renaissance, but it perhaps held a grain of truth. Whilst it can be argued that the gallery is fulfilling its duty by providing the local population with the same opportunities as offered to residents of other major centres, this can also look like a tendency simply to follow fashions set elsewhere. As a general criticism, however, it fails to acknowledge that the institution has frequently shown many artists from outside that fashionable circle. Henry's reference to the gallery's 'predilection for German art', including shows of E.W. Nay or John Heartfield, indicated a clear area of personal preference, unaffected by fashions elsewhere and not copying a trend set in London. The exhibitions of neglected Scottish artists such as James Pryde were also demonstrations of the gallery's wider commitment to Scottish art of the 20th

¹³ Henry, *The Herald*, 29 March 1999.

¹⁴ Board Room Minutes, September 1997.

¹⁵ Laura Cumming, 'Honey, I shrunk the public', *Observer*, 4 April 1999.

century, going far beyond fashionable choices, and fulfilling the original ambition to show the people of Scotland the full panoply of national and international art production. The criticism that it waited for the judgement of others before showing a young artist resonates with the remarks by both Hall and Calvocoressi about the difficulty of remaining in touch with contemporary art: the geographical distance from the main centres of art production hindered a full engagement with the latest avant-garde trends. This might be interpreted as an abdication of responsibility, but it could be argued that the institution can best perform its multiple roles by observing the major trends elsewhere, and seeking more actively to intervene early in the case of Scottish artists.

Remarks made by Andrew Nairne as he left his post as head of Dundee

Contemporary Arts in 2000 introduce another dimension to the issue. He described his approach:

It's about giving people what they didn't know they wanted. Good art institutions should not be about second-guessing the public's taste. It should be about using your judgement as an expert and your passion and your gut feeling, putting these artists in front of the public and giving them opportunities and information to engage with that work. What will happen, and what does happen, is that people come in thinking it isn't for them and go out thinking it is.¹⁶

This raises a slightly different problem, yet one to which the SNGMA has always been sensitive. They had never attempted to 'second-guess' their public's taste, but rather had hoped to shape that taste gently to include the more challenging aspects of modern art; they had interpreted their mission to 'educate' the public. Nairne's description of people being unexpectedly persuaded that modern art is for them recalls Colin Thompson's remark in the negotiations over the **Creation** exhibition, that he hoped visitors would 'come with curiosity about modern art, and very likely with suspicion that it is all rubbish, and [...] go away with an impression that there is much more to it, that it can now and then be not only enjoyable but illuminating, and that it is not after all simply pulling your leg'.¹⁷ The uncomfortable interface between the institution and its public is present in all museums of modern art, but there is no consensus over how best to negotiate it – opinions range from the position adopted by Johannes Cladders at Mönchengladbach, who explained defiantly that: 'I never made any concessions to the taste of the public', to Hall, who had always attempted to win

¹⁶ Moira Jeffrey, 'Top of the Transfer List', *Sunday Herald*, 10 December 2000.

¹⁷ Memo to Hall, 13 September 1983. GMA A33/1/2/127/64.

over the local audience gently.¹⁸ Nairne's approach was clearly closer to Cladders. The difficulty lay more in the problem of ensuring that the public at least visited: experience had shown that the public simply did not come to exhibitions that they thought they would not like, so it was never possible to verify if the policy worked or not. Like Cumming and Henry, Nairne too was critical of the decision to show Gary Hume in the first year at the Dean, rather than a Scottish artist. 'Whatever the reason for it, I think it's unfortunate that there's a show of [London painter] Gary Hume's work at the GMA before there's a show of Christine Borland's.'¹⁹

This criticism stands up less well to scrutiny. The comment coincided with an exhibition of works by Alison Watt, entitled **Shift: New Works by Alison Watt**. Watt was the youngest artist ever to have an exhibition at the SNGMA, and her show contradicts the criticism that the institution only ever followed trends set elsewhere. Nairne's reference to Christine Borland serves more as a reminder of the variety of current Scottish talent than as a serious indictment of the Gallery's lack of commitment to local art. A brief perusal of the exhibitions shown over 2000 /2001 demonstrates an overwhelming preponderance of Scottish-based works, ranging from Robin Philipson, Elizabeth Blackadder, Adrian Wisniewski to Ian Hamilton Finlay. Clearly, with the exception of Alison Watt, these did not represent the avant-garde of contemporary Scottish art, but as a 'modern' art gallery, the remit extends into the (relatively) recent past as well as the present. Because of this broader remit, it is obliged to balance different interests; criticism should focus more on whether it fails to achieve the correct balance, not that it does not try.

Contrary to Nairne's criticisms about lack of attention to Scottish artists, the period around the year 2000 was one of intense focus on the work of these artists. At the GMA Committee meeting in February 2000, Keith Hartley stressed the positive moment for art in Scotland and declared the institution's intention to focus its attention on acquiring examples: 'contemporary Scottish art had rarely been as lively and as highly regarded as it was at present. The Gallery was therefore keen to build up an exemplary historic collection while there was still time to do so'.²⁰ The use of the word 'historic' here demonstrates the attitude from within any museum: even when considering contemporary works, the intrinsic value and the role of these works

¹⁸ Interview with Johannes Cladders in Obrist, p. 54.

¹⁹ *Sunday Herald*, 10 December 2000.

²⁰ Minutes of GMA meeting, 21 February 2000.

is always projected into some imaginary point in the future. The purchase has to be evaluated in similar ways as for historical works, although without the reassurance of the ‘test of time’ confirmation. Howard N. Fox explores this notion in his essay ‘The Right to be Wrong’:

Though most large museums in the US and Europe now collect modern and contemporary art, museums constitutionally foster a perception of history that relates almost exclusively to the past, just as some religions and cultures do. Yet it is just as valid to perceive history as a force that unfolds in the future. Rather than conceiving the museum’s relationship to history as a relationship to the past, it is possible to imagine a relationship to the future. Museum curators need to restrict their role to preserving the past or to preserving the present as the past for future generations; like artists and scientists, they can at least speculate.²¹

Fox explains how curators specialising in contemporary works have to make judgements that are directed into the future: ‘Anticipation of the future, rather than codification of the past, is a necessary attribute of the contemporary curator’s function’. This lay behind Hartley’s reference to an ‘exemplary historic collection’.

Drawbacks of the site

The extensive grounds around the building offered new opportunities for the NGS. The Belford Road perimeter of the Dean Centre, originally the orchard and kitchen garden for the orphanage, had been used as public allotments since the war. The proposed gallery conversion received some adverse publicity when Lothian Regional Council sent out notices to these allotment holders to quit. A campaign was mounted to save them, which gained the support of Paolozzi himself. In fact, in a bizarre twist of fate, the retention of the allotments, and consequently also of the second world war Home Guard shed situated within their boundary and used by the allotment holders, opened the way for a rapprochement with Ian Hamilton Finlay, the internationally acclaimed artist and creator of the unique garden artwork at Little Sparta. He had been at loggerheads with the NGS for many years, refusing even to allow his work to be sold to them.²² He had been among the fiercest critics of the plan to dedicate a gallery to Paolozzi (see Chapter 4, note 77), but following the publicity surrounding the allotment crisis, Margaret Mackay, a curator at the GMA and herself an allotment holder, thought he might be intrigued by the shed. She contacted Calvocoressi,

²¹ Howard N. Fox, in Altshuler, pp. 25-26.

²² A comment made at the start of 2000 reveals the extent of the rupture: ‘Last year the Gallery tried to buy a major stone sculpture (The World according to the Romans), but Finlay would not allow it to do so. To add insult to injury the Gallery subsequently learnt that the work had been given to the Tate Gallery.’ GMA Minutes, 21 February 2000.

suggesting: 'Camouflage in a home guard hut in a garden should appeal to him?'²³ Her astute assessment proved correct. Finlay found the strange combination of elements inspirational and agreed to produce something. The work he produced, *Idylls*, brought about the reconciliation that the GMA had been hoping to achieve. Finlay was impressed at the way the Dean was being converted: 'Pale.Ozzis apart, I think the Dean Gallery is beautiful. The orphans are a haunting presence'.²⁴ He offered to make an outdoor piece for the grounds, proposing a work to be placed on the long wall between the gallery and the car park. The proposal was well received, and became the first project (as opposed to completed work) to receive funding from the NACF.²⁵ The work, entitled *Six Definitions: Temple, Grove, Horizon, Sheep, Shadow, Peace* (GMA 4404), took the form of six bronze inscriptions embedded into the wall separating the car park from the main grounds of the Dean, alluding symbolically to the cultural content awaiting visitors as they proceed from the car park into the Gallery.

It became evident once the Dean opened that it would be difficult to establish a clear connection between the two buildings. Despite the sites being situated directly opposite each other, their different orientation and their extensive surrounding parkland meant there was little natural link between them. Although built within a few years of each other, John Watson's was an example of an austere Greek Revival style while the Dean was a more fanciful Romantic Classicism, so there was no architectural unity beyond the adherence to Classical detailing. As both were set well back from the street, it was important to ensure that their presence was signposted, and that visual, as well as physical connections were created between them. Many ideas were considered, including an underground link similar to that at the National Gallery in Washington, or a connecting bridge over the road, but all proved too expensive. As work progressed on converting the Dean, the idea was formulated of using a landscaping feature to connect the two sites. The Trustees arranged to visit the landscape designer Charles Jencks' garden in Portrack, near Dumfries, the Garden of Cosmic Speculation, to view his distinctive landscape feature there, entitled

²³ Memo from Mackay to Calvocoressi, 26 February 1999. Dean Conversion Files. Box 3.

²⁴ Letter to Calvocoressi, 21 June 2000. Dean Conversion Files. Box 3.

²⁵ 'We have just received notification from the National Art Collections Fund that they will support the acquisition with a grant of £20,000. This is the first time in their 98-year history that they have helped fund a work which does not yet exist (they support the acquisition of finished works, not proposals), and they had to change their own rules in order to do this...' Letter from Calvocoressi to Ian Hamilton Finlay. 15 May 2001. Dean Conversion Files. Box 3.

Landform. They saw great potential in this, and commissioned a feasibility study to create a similar intervention at Belford Road. Some were in favour of a second *Landform* within the grounds of the Dean, to create a more emphatic link between the two sites, but eventually only one was agreed, to be located in front of the GMA. The construction process was lengthy because of planning issues, with some local residents objecting to the 'disruption created in this largely suburban area by the continuing process of reconstruction of the Galleries', but eventually work could proceed in the autumn of 2001.²⁶

The incorporation of the Dean Gallery into the NGS's estates helped alleviate the multiple problems of space, at least in the short term. The converted building provided sufficient office space, which meant that the rented premises in the city centre were no longer required. There was also adequate storage for the archival and library material acquired from Gabrielle Keiller and from Antony Penrose, which now formed an important part of the Gallery's claim to be a study centre for Dada and Surrealism. Although this was a positive and welcome development, the very success of the venture added new tensions. The gallery's position as a leading centre for Surrealist studies meant that it was now offered further archival material and artists' books; eventually a separate allocation of funds was made to allow this to develop. It is an area in which the gallery has continued to expand, and now has an outstanding collection of archival material and of *livres d'artistes*, including copies of Matisse's *Jazz* (GMA 2284) and Miró's *Constellations* (GMA A35/2/RPL1/0014). Because of their fragility, these items are not often on display, but they constitute an important part of the institution's hidden resources that add weight to the overall collections, and which are always accessible to scholars on request.

For the first time, the institution had a designated temporary exhibition space. It could therefore plan more exhibitions, knowing that these would not necessitate withdrawing works from the permanent collection on display. As noted, the choice of exhibitions in the first year was not entirely successful: Andreas Gursky, followed by Gary Hume. The GMA also failed to engage the public with an exhibition of the German artist, Joseph Beuys. The combination of Hume and Beuys failed to capture the public's attention - both were 'difficult' artists for the general public - and visitor numbers were lower than expected. The Beuys exhibition had important long-term

²⁶ Letter from Lester Borley, 11 January 2000. Dean Conversion Files: Landform.

consequences, however, as it gave rise to another collaboration with a major private collection that would once again transform the gallery. The exhibition had consisted mainly of works owned by London art dealer, Anthony d'Offay. D'Offay had attended university in Edinburgh and had retained his affection for the city and for the NGS. He possessed a considerable collection of works by Beuys, and in August 1999, he met with Calvocoressi and Hartley to enquire if the GMA might be interested in purchasing this entire collection. The response from the GMA committee was that it 'would be an extraordinary acquisition', creating a 'concentration of excellence comparable to Surrealism and Paolozzi; and given Beuys's historical links with Scotland (8 visits in 16 years, resulting in several major artworks and performances), entirely appropriate'.²⁷ The response highlights all the relevant connections that would make the acquisition appropriate, both internally to the gallery and its existing holdings, and to the wider Scottish art field, where Beuys had made such a significant contribution. The reference to Beuys's links with Scotland gives an insight into how the institution saw itself in relation to Scotland and Scottish art. It saw part of its role to act as the appropriate receptacle for works that were significant both as evidence of international art developments and as local historical records. Beuys's historic connections with Scotland had been instigated by Richard Demarco, whose Gallery's programme of activities had caused Hall to bemoan the lack of opportunities at the SNGMA for a similar programme back in the 1960s. It remained a fitting role for the National Gallery, however, to collect such a significant part of the artistic patrimony of the nation. The qualities of stability and permanence, which prevent it from engaging directly with radical contemporary art, are precisely the qualities that eventually allow it to carry out the function of conserving those works that had initially been too radical. In fact, the repercussions of this initial consultation over acquiring the Beuys collection grew into a much broader collaboration with d'Offay, stretching beyond the negotiations about a single artist's work, and eventually bringing about a substantial shift in the balance of the GMA's collection.

Clifford reflected that, in hindsight, exhibitions like Hume and Beuys would have been better scheduled 'outwith the Festival period', and regretted that 'the delicious and most tempting menu of Morandi and Magritte [planned for the Christmas period]... will coincide with the presence of a much smaller public'. In fact, the Magritte exhibition was enormously successful, contradicting Clifford's

²⁷ Minutes of GMA Meeting, 23 August 1999.

prognostication that ‘the Hogmanay crowds may not be particularly artistic’.²⁸ The success again proved that the right show could attract large audiences: however much the location is criticised, people have always been prepared to come to an exhibition that interests them. The problem is that there is only a limited range of exhibitions with this direct appeal to a wide audience. The success continued the following year, however, with Clifford describing it as an ‘annus mirabilis’: the Dean housed a highly successful exhibition of works by Salvador Dalí, **Optical Illusions**, once more playing to the strength of the collection by exploring further aspects of Surrealism. The exhibition exemplified the influence generated by possessing a valuable and desirable collection of works: the works were borrowed as a reciprocal arrangement for lending several key works to St Petersburg, Florida, highlighting the ‘commodity’ value of major works that can be used for such exchanges. This proved to be one of the SNGMA’s most popular exhibitions, with visitor numbers of over 58,000. The exhibition that followed, however, in November 2000 turned out to be the most successful ever mounted by the SNGMA at Belford Road. The **Scottish Colourists** was seen by 67,000 people, and 25,000 catalogues were sold. The success of the **Scottish Colourists** brings the GMA back to its origins: it was interest in artists such as these that had originally prompted the local audience to want to establish a Gallery of Modern Art. It is an example of Lorente’s thesis that interest in local art and modern art are closely intertwined. Local interest and pride in the achievements of the Colourists has remained strong, although perhaps driven more by nostalgia for figurative depictions suggestive of a lost ‘golden age’ than for their contribution to the avant-garde of their day.

The Dalí exhibition at the Dean had been complemented by an exhibition of works by Paul Klee at the GMA. The policy of having two exhibitions running concurrently became standard, and made sense given the awkwardness of the site, offering visitors better value for money in return for making the effort to come.²⁹ Calvocoressi pointed out that it would have to be the last exhibition held in the GMA unless a system of climate control were installed, as lenders were no longer prepared to allow their works to be shown in unstable conditions. The logic of this position led to a concern about the conditions of the works from the permanent collection, which deserved equally good conditions. Trustees commented that the works held by the institution

²⁸ Minutes of 19 July 1999.

²⁹ This was also a marketing strategy, to sell combined tickets at a reduced price and encourage visitors to see both exhibitions.

deserved as much attention as was granted to works on loan. The museum's primary duty is to 'preserve' works for the future: in the Corporate Plan, objective number one is always 'to care for, preserve and strengthen collections'.

Acquisition opportunities continued to present themselves at awkward moments for the Gallery. During the final phases of preparation for the Dean opening, another well-loved piece held on long-term loan since 1975, Barbara Hepworth's *The Wave*, was offered for sale by the Havinden family.



Figure 25: Barbara Hepworth, *The Wave*

The work had belonged to Ashley Havinden, who had bought it directly from Barbara Hepworth in 1945. Following Havinden's death in 1973, his son had placed several works from his father's collection on long-term loan at the SNGMA, including the wooden carving by Hepworth. The Gallery had been keen to purchase the work ever since it first arrived. Douglas Hall had written to Michael Havinden in 1976: 'we are still hoping that we shall be given the opportunity of acquiring one of two works from the estate – the Calder and the Hepworth *Wave* being the most obvious candidates'.³⁰ Hepworth herself had expressed the hope that it might find a permanent home in the Gallery: when she was informed of the loans, she wrote to Hall: 'I was really delighted to hear that you have those three sculptures in your gallery... I am so thrilled that these works have come into your hands, I do hope perhaps forever, that

³⁰ Letter from Hall, 2 February 1976. Registry files: Hepworth; *The Wave*.

would make me really happy'.³¹ It was unfortunate that the much-hoped-for opportunity finally presented itself at a time when the SNGMA had so few resources available. The change in approach to large-scale purchases is evident here. The Minutes for October 1998 state: 'the Gallery would make funding applications to the HLF (£100,000), the Henry Moore Foundation (£50,000) and the NACF (£50,000). Grant applications had already been drafted'. Clearly the institution had developed an efficient strategy for accessing extra resources from various funds. Applications for funding now occupy a great deal of curators' time, but if successful, these applications can provide access to large-scale financial assistance. Eventually, through a system of deferred payments, the purchase was finalised in 1999.

The additional storage space for artworks in the Dean basement was welcome, but still far from adequate for all the NGS requirements. They had to retain other facilities, including a storage unit at Beaverhall, where much of the material from the Paolozzi gift was kept. Disaster was only narrowly averted there when the storage unit was flooded during heavy rains in April 2000. Fortunately nothing unique or irreplaceable was damaged, but it brought home the primary duty of care towards the items in the permanent collection. Some items of minor importance were damaged, and the process for de-accessioning these proves how protected objects are when they enter a public collection.³² The additional storage at Port Edgar, outside South Queensferry, also had to be retained, but this was not satisfactory either in terms of easy accessibility or perfect climatic conditions. The NGS were happy therefore to collaborate with the Museum of Scotland in the construction of a major new store at Granton, which was finally ready in October 2002. This was supposed to solve all storage problems for the foreseeable future, but by mid 2004, the Minutes report: '[Granton] is already nearly full, and requires expansion in the next one or two years'.³³ The problems of storage are now even more complex, given the range of materials and the size of many pieces of installation works.

During all the discussions and work at the Dean, the GMA was facing a different problem. When they had first taken over the former John Watson's building, there had been an understanding that the rent would remain favourable to the art institution.

³¹ Letter from Hepworth, 13 March 1975. Registry files: Hepworth; *The Wave*.

³² A separate form had to be filled out for every individual item, explaining in detail the level of damage suffered and requesting permission to de-accession it.

³³ Board Room Minutes, July 2004.

In reality, the rent had been rising consistently with the market, and by the late 1990s had reached an unsustainable level. The original rent had been £34,000 per annum, but this together with the interest on the loan that had been granted to carry out the conversion, now amounted to £428,000 (in July 1999). This was described as ‘far from the generous spirit of the original gesture in which John Watson’s School had been offered’.³⁴ After lengthy negotiations, an agreement was reached that the NGS should purchase the lease of the John Watson building and grounds with an option to buy after thirty years. This tortuous legal process was finally completed in 2005, to the relief of all concerned, and with an estimated annual saving of £500,000.³⁵

Changing role for museums and galleries

Clifford’s Director’s Report of January 2001 opened with a long discourse on the changing nature of museums and galleries, prompted by a recently published article by Charles Saumarez Smith on the need for museums to distinguish themselves from commercial ventures. Both the original article and Clifford’s response to it address the difficulty facing cultural institutions. Saumarez Smith made a case for the ‘cult of the real’, and argued in favour of interesting and worthwhile exhibitions instead of ones that were intended ‘to pull in the largest number of people’.³⁶ Clifford agreed and added further reflections of his own. He noted: ‘We have entered into the world of the Millennium dome culture, where the world of the fun-fair, Disneyworld and Alton Towers are the order of the day,’ and referred to recent exhibitions of ‘motorcycles and Armani’ as acting ‘like pornography ... staged to titillate and corral rather than to educate and provide a wider vision and deeper insights’.³⁷ The tone of the message may appear excessively melodramatic, but it reflected a genuine dilemma within museums of balancing the need to maintain high visitor numbers with the need to maintain high standards of artistic integrity in the exhibitions programme. Danielle Rice discusses this balance:

As today’s museum administrators respond to economic constraints and opportunities by marketing their institutions through crowd-pleasing blockbuster exhibitions and expanding attractions to include shops, restaurants, and catering services, they participate in blurring the very boundaries between high and popular culture that their predecessors, however inadvertently, helped construct. While some critics have complained that museums have abandoned serious

³⁴ Finance Report in Board Room Minutes, July 1999.

³⁵ Reported in Corporate Plan 2004-09.

³⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, 16 December 2000.

³⁷ Director’s Report, January 2001.

educational efforts and remade themselves as theme parks, the fact is that education departments in art museums throughout the country have continued to flourish.³⁸

It is impossible to avoid the move towards providing popular entertainment, but this is not the only trend: there is also an equal drive to offer a wider range of educational services. The Edinburgh institution was in line with others in expanding this side of its activities. The Education department has come to play an increasingly central role, often engaging in some of the most original and challenging projects within the institution. This suggests a rebalancing of the educational role of the Gallery, which counters the argument of excessive commercialisation.

The exhibitions held in the summer of 2001 (**The Surrealist and the Photographer; Roland Penrose and Lee Miller** at the Dean and **Rachel Whiteread** at the GMA) provided the kind of new insights Clifford had hoped for, and complied with the high artistic standards of both the Curatorial and the Education Departments, but by September he had to report their lack of success with the public, and he questioned the marketing strategies employed. That art has to be marketed is now taken for granted: it is not powerful enough to attract visitors without careful promotion. Despite Clifford's rejection of Disneyland principles, when low numbers were recorded, he exhorted the Galleries to look for more popular topics. The need to ensure the correct balance between popular entertainment and intellectually or spiritually stimulating exhibitions came to be regarded as too important to be left to curators alone. By 2002 a newly-constituted 'Management Group', comprising the Directors of the Galleries and representatives from Finance and Development departments, became actively involved in decisions previously taken by curators. 'Management Group was starting to look at exhibition strategy, taking into account the need to have a combination of more popular and more academic exhibitions across all Galleries. Exhibitions strategy was now a regular topic on Management Group agenda and would be an integral part of its responsibility'.³⁹ Although finance had always been important in exhibition planning, giving responsibility for exhibition strategy to people whose background was not artistic marks a major shift. At the next meeting it was noted that 'from April 2003 onwards all exhibition proposals would be considered by Management Group to ensure a robust strategic view of the

³⁸ Danielle Rice, 'Balancing Act: Education and the Competing Impulses of Museum Work', in *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, Vol. 29, No 1, 2003, p. 18.

³⁹ Board Room Minutes, January 2002.

programme'.⁴⁰ However sensible this strategy might seem from a business point of view, it undermines Saumarez Smith's argument. The possible conflict became evident during discussions about an exhibition of works by the celebrity photographer, Mario Testino, which was imposed on the GMA against their wishes:

The [GMA] Committee was concerned that although doubts had been expressed about the artistic merit of the exhibition, Management had decided to go ahead purely for financial reasons. However, Management had been informed that the exhibition would be very expensive to mount and would have to attract more than 22,000 visitors (with sales of 1500 catalogues) to break even.... It was agreed that the exhibition, if properly marketed, could attract new audiences and that the Gallery would work as hard as possible to make it a success.⁴¹

In the end, the attendances for this exhibition far exceeded the estimates, with almost 34,000 people visiting, many of whom can be supposed to be 'new audiences'. The staff were quick to point out, however, that despite the high numbers of paying visitors and the £60,000 of sponsorship from Lloyds TSB, the show had not been a commercial success because of the very high costs involved, and the poor catalogue sales, which brought in only £15,750 instead of the predicted £40,000. The idea of reaching out to new audiences is an attractive and worthy one, but it raises a dilemma if the gallery achieves this by showing works that do not stretch or challenge the audience. This newly acquired audience will only be likely to return for shows of a similar popular nature, and therefore extending the audience is an illusion. If the idea is more generally to extend the services offered by the Gallery, this should be done carefully, understanding the full implications of any new role introduced, and ensuring that it does not inadvertently usurp the original function of the institution.

The NGS spent the early years of the decade once again under intense self-scrutiny driven principally by economic demands, analysing the effect these demands had on the underlying principles of the organisation. Much time was spent examining how best to incorporate new business strategies into what had been a cultural institution with an essentially educational role. Clifford commented in his 2003 Report: 'We continually kid ourselves that the NGS are a 'boutique' sized operation with modest goals. Actually, we are not. We are now a big Gallery with great ambitions, confined within the carapace of elegant and architecturally distinguished small buildings'.⁴² The description fits the SNGMA very well. The elegant carapace within which it was confined reflected neither the level of achievement nor of ambition of the institution:

⁴⁰ Board Room Minutes, May 2002.

⁴¹ Minutes of GMA Committee, 31 October 2002.

⁴² Director's Report, 20 January – 17 March 2003.

having to compromise on the building continued to thwart its potential. By March of the following year, the need to consider the 'expedient solution of a new building at the GMA to attract a possible, really important, collection of contemporary art' was noted.⁴³ This marks the first reference to the prospect of acquiring the whole d'Offay collection, not just the Beuys works. D'Offay was looking for the best way to house his vast collection of art from the latter half of the twentieth century once he retired. He had long enjoyed excellent relations with the SNGMA, and in 2002 gifted a Richard Long sculpture, *Macduff Circle* (GMA 4483), 'to mark Richard's 15 years as Keeper/Director'.⁴⁴ The following year he and his wife presented a Bill Viola video, *Surrender* (GMA 4683), and announced their commitment to donating a piece every year to the institution. His affection for the gallery was thus clearly demonstrated, and the prospect of acquiring such a large collection of works was of major consequence to the still relatively 'boutique-sized' SNGMA. The resolution of this development took several years to evolve.

The Dean had quickly settled into the role of providing temporary exhibition space and permanent display of the outstanding Surrealist collection. It has performed both of these functions very well, but there has always been an underlying tension about how it fits with its neighbour, the SNGMA. The SNGMA's original intention was to present a comprehensive overview of modern art from the start of the twentieth century, but with the opening of the Dean, one section of that overview has been siphoned off, leaving a sizeable gap in the SNGMA's version of twentieth century art. The premise for the Dean, however, was as a study centre for Surrealism and a gallery dedicated to Paolozzi. The study centre has been a success, with the archive and library services offering excellent research facilities. There is a clear logic to keeping this centre intact, rather than dispersed through the main modern collections, and any alterations to the programme at the Dean would have to address this question. There have been many different suggestions for rationalizing the function of the Dean, such as reducing the area for display and holding only temporary exhibitions, or showing permanent collection works pre-1945; it remains an element in the overall estate of the NGS whose identity, although in some ways quite

⁴³ Director General's Report, 27 January – 22 March 2004.

⁴⁴ Board Room Minutes, May 2002.

specifically defined, remains problematic and is not definitively set.⁴⁵ At the time of writing, however, it has just received its first face-lift. The rich post-modern colour scheme has been replaced with a muted pink in the entrance and white in the stairwells. This was done to accommodate a major new commission, from the Scottish-based artist, Richard Wright, which had been planned since the opening of the Dean and which will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter.

The fruits of the decision to collect more recent art were showcased in an exhibition in 2002 entitled **New**, made up of the SNGMA's acquisitions over the last decade. It testified to the judicious purchasing policy, and illustrated the extent to which the gallery was now able to champion the work of Scottish artists. Several commentators mentioned the work of Christine Borland, in particular, commenting on how refreshing it was to see works by artists other than the standard field of talent so well-known in London, contradicting the earlier criticisms by Henry and Cumming.⁴⁶ The still-dominant young British artists were well represented here but alongside a wide selection of others. Preparations for the exhibition had directly affected purchases in the period leading up to it. At the GMA meeting in Feb 2002, the Committee faced a choice between purchasing a Spin painting by Damien Hirst, which would be shown in **New**, or a small painting by Alfred Wallis, *Harbour with Two Lighthouses and Boats*, 'which would have filled a significant gap in the Gallery's representation of pre-war British painting'.⁴⁷ Given the restricted funds available, the Gallery chose to purchase the Hirst because of its place in the forthcoming exhibition, but expressed regret at having to lose the opportunity to purchase the Wallis. Such choices are at the heart of the Gallery's overall identity. By the early 2000s, the SNGMA had more to gain from possessing a Damien Hirst work than an Alfred Wallis, although both were much appreciated, and would have improved the collection. It is impossible to predict which will prove the better acquisition in the long term, but the Gallery opted to satisfy its immediate requirements.

The exhibition was generally well received, although several reviewers took issue with the title, as most of the works were from the 1990s. In the grand sweep of time

⁴⁵ In the summer of 2011, as part of a general re-branding exercise at the NGS, the name 'Dean' was dropped, and the building is now referred to as 'Modern Two', in an effort to strengthen the sense of a single campus with the GMA, now known as 'Modern One'.

⁴⁶ 'It is good to see Christine Borland given the same space as Damien Hirst...' Elizabeth Mahoney, *Guardian*, 5 August 2002.

⁴⁷ Minutes of GMA meeting, 26 February 2002.

that art history occupies, these works were ‘new’, although it is an indication of the ever-increasing thirst for novelty and innovation in all fields that they were not sufficiently ‘new’! One journalist made some pertinent remarks about the difficulty facing a public institution:

To justify spending public money you must have proof of importance, and by that time it’s often too late. You’re outpriced and the budget is diverted to a work by an artist of proven worth... That’s what makes the show’s title so ironic. ‘New’ has to mean ‘now’. And the National Galleries has to act now to create a separate, modest, contemporary purchasing fund, giving power to its curators to make instant decisions. The Trustees must demonstrate their faith in the undoubted talent of their staff. Otherwise it will be a case of ‘too little, too late.’⁴⁸

The GMA had actually always had access to small amounts of money for contemporary works, but the difficulty consists also in deciding precisely when to purchase works by contemporary artists. The problems that arose over early works by Houston and Blackadder in the selection for **Scottish Art since 1900** point to the need to choose carefully the moment to commit to purchasing works that will remain significant, and that will be able to represent the artist later. The Gallery does not want to have a work from too early a phase of an artist’s development, yet if it waits too long, the prices will have risen considerably. The need to balance bargain hunting and talent spotting persists. Adopting a slightly different perspective, the review in the *Herald* picked up an idea that had been current at the time of the SMAA back in the early years of the century: ‘Until now, it has not been easy to see these people’s work in Scotland except on rare visits’.⁴⁹ It could be taken as an indictment of the institution that it had not provided this until now, but the article itself makes the comment: ‘better late than never’.

The **New** exhibition coincided with the unveiling of Jencks’s *Landform Ueda*, which also generated much publicity for the institution, almost entirely positive. There were a few negative voices, with one local resident declaring that the view confronting the visitor from one side resembled a railway embankment. The reviews, on the other hand, were almost unanimous in praising the structure, and the institution for proceeding with such a large-scale project: ‘In these times when financial concerns often stifle public projects before they even reach the drawing board, the Gallery can be proud to have shown a commitment to something that will provoke, entertain and

⁴⁸ Iain Gale, ‘Nothing New in Recent Acquisitions’, *Scotland on Sunday*, 28 July 2002.

⁴⁹ Robert Dawson Scott, ‘Art that should prove a draw’, *Herald*, 29 June 2002.

enthuse us for many years to come'.⁵⁰ Clifford described it as '... transforming a dull sports field into a magical ziggurat of emerald turf and sparkling water'.⁵¹ It received official recognition when it won the prestigious and lucrative Gulbenkian prize in 2004, with Lloyd Grossman, Chairman of the judging panel, proclaiming: 'Landform has the potential to change people's ideas about what a museum does and can do'.⁵² The comment highlights the complexity of the museum's functions. In the contemporary world, a museum has to do far more than simply conserve and display works of art: it has to engage people's attention already from the exterior, and then it must find ways to 'do' things that will stimulate, entertain, educate and enrich the visitors. The *Landform* was to act as a signpost, attracting the potential audience to come and explore the services on offer.⁵³



Figure 26: Charles Jencks, *Landform Ueda*

The *Landform* commission had originated from the need to create a more obvious connection between the two sites on Belford Road. Its construction had been part of a major re-structuring of the access to both sites, altering both the pedestrian and the vehicular approach routes: work was carried out over the winter of 2001-02. The

⁵⁰ Rebecca Dunbar, 'High Jencks', *Scotland on Sunday*, 25 August 2002.

⁵¹ Director's Report, November 2001- January 2002.

⁵² Quoted in 'Chaos Garden Scoops £100,000 Museum Award', *Independent*, 12 May 2004.

⁵³ It is interesting to reflect that the work commissioned with the prize money (Anthony Gormley's *6 Times*) extends this notion further by taking the museum out of the restricted frame of the gallery building and placing its works directly in the urban landscape.

scheme attempted to create a clearer pedestrian path between the two, passing along the lower contour of the *Landform*, across a newly installed pedestrian crossing, onto the path leading beyond the allotments to the entrance to the Dean. This route provides a direct link, although the connection can never be entirely satisfactory because it imposes a lateral approach to the Dean, whose elegant classical symmetry can only be fully appreciated when viewed frontally. The visual connection that the *Landform* was intended to strengthen really only works on those occasions when it is possible to climb to the top of it; the view here unites the two sites by hiding the road between them. Unfortunately there are many times when this view is unattainable, either for health and safety reasons when the weather conditions render the surfaces slippery, or when the turf requires attention. The *Landform* has added a dramatic and dynamic element to the exterior landscape of the GMA, adding movement to the static façade in the reflections on the surface of the water. It is, however, a high-maintenance sculpture, requiring frequent re-turfing, clearing of the algae in the pools, and pigeon and seagull controls. These ongoing costs point to the many unforeseen problems that can arise with new forms of art; the question of conservation is immensely complex.

The Dean was never meant to provide extra permanent display space for more recent art. As the prospect of the d'Offay collection was analysed in greater detail, it became clear that the most important issue would be finding space to house and display the works. This led to a further space assessment across the two Belford Road sites. It was noted, as had always been understood, that the combined sites 'have significant development potential', and that additional exhibition space was required in order 'to attract significant gifts, which could only be housed at this Edinburgh site'.⁵⁴ Once again the close connection between the building and what it can contain became apparent: as at Inverleith House, the lack of available space might hinder the expansion of the collection. The prospect of acquiring such a large collection, therefore, prompted another quest for more accommodation, starting with plans for building an extension to the GMA. This was included in the Corporate Plan for 2005 to 2009:

[The GMA] building was converted, rather sparingly, in 1984. A master plan was prepared in 2001 for up-grading the building and increasing the proportion of gallery to office space within at a cost of £3.6m. However in order to

⁵⁴ Corporate Plan 2004/09

accommodate new major loans, a substantial new extension of the highest possible design quality is now proposed. This will provide further gallery space of an area equivalent to that currently available at the GMA and Dean combined. A new restaurant, shop, print room and library will be incorporated. The cost is estimated to be about £19m.⁵⁵

It is clear from various communications that this plan was considered feasible. A letter to the Gulbenkian highlights the importance of having acquired the John Watson's site, as it allowed the institution freedom to propose long-term modifications:

Since the Gulbenkian award was made, the Scottish Executive has released funds to allow the National Galleries to purchase the NGMA building. This has allowed us to develop ideas to provide further accommodation for our expanding collection with a new extension on site. We intend that this building will become an icon of contemporary architecture and will become a focal point for the display of contemporary art.⁵⁶

Similar optimism was expressed elsewhere: 'it looks as if the proposed extension or new wing behind the GMA is much more of a reality than we thought'.⁵⁷ Clifford's Report to the Trustees in May referred to the proposals in positive terms, indicating the level of ambition that they encapsulated:

When writing about new build we must also not forget the ambitious scheme that is being developed by Richard Calvocoressi for new accommodation and, above all, display space at Belford Road.... There are several exciting opportunities here which could revolutionize the collections of modern art in Scotland and indeed place us as a major rival to Tate Modern, as the greatest collection of 20th and 21st century art within the UK.⁵⁸

The claim was not far-fetched: the prospect of the Scottish institution acquiring the entire contents of the d'Offay collection would have 'revolutionized' the SNGMA's collections, which for the first time in their history might have rivalled Tate Modern. The prospect of a private collection taking on such a prominent position within a national collection is one that must arouse critical scrutiny. Ivan Gaskell has explored the question in *Vermeer's Wager*:

The truism that there is no gift without recompense to the donor leads many scholars to make observations critical of the accommodations that an institution will make in order to secure resources. At times the tail that is the donor, actual or potential, may seem to wag the dog that is the art museum. For example, 'vanity exhibitions' and their associated publications, devoted to individual private collections, can at times appear to determine an art museum's

⁵⁵ 'Masterplan for NGS 2004' in Corporate Plan 2005-2009: major extension to GMA projected for 2009.

⁵⁶ Letter to Gulbenkian Foundation, 14 April 2005. Dean Conversion Files: Landform.

⁵⁷ Letter to Troughton and Broughton, April, 2005. Dean Conversion Files: Landform.

⁵⁸ Director's Report, 25 May 2005.

programming. The balance of taste and understanding that govern an institution's sense of propriety in donor relations usually remain unarticulated.⁵⁹

The d'Offay case offers an intriguing example of this particular phenomenon. In terms of taste, there was little conflict that might be seen as the 'tail wagging the dog'. The overlap between what the Edinburgh Gallery wanted to have and to show and what was contained in the package the London dealer was offering was evident. The d'Offay collection filled many gaps the SNGMA had been seeking to fill for years; in particular, works by Andy Warhol and Gerhard Richter had been on acquisition lists for several years. The Gallery did not alter its intended direction to accommodate these works; acquiring the works from this collection would simply allow it to fulfil its ambitions sooner. The prospect of the proposed acquisition also directly affected the exhibition schedule; several exhibitions were arranged that had the works of d'Offay forming the central core, although they were never openly acknowledged as such, simply referred to as 'private collection', and do not seem to fit the definition of 'vanity exhibitions'. Again, they were exhibitions that the Gallery was delighted to curate, showing Beuys, Warhol, Mueck, Ruscha, so they should not be viewed too suspiciously. The prospect of acquiring so many works at one time was to some extent reminiscent of the possible acquisition of the SMAA collection in the early years of the Gallery's existence. The difference now was that the Gallery had established a strong enough core identity for itself that would not be radically altered by the sudden expansion of the collection in one direction; it would simply extend its influence in the specific area of later twentieth century art.

All of this remained irrelevant, however, if nowhere could be found to house the works. While discussions continued about a possible extension, another suggestion was put forward that captured the attention and imagination of Trustees and Directors alike. A large warehouse in Leith, the VA Tech building, had become available. The proposal seemed to offer the potential to emulate the Guggenheim in Bilbao or Tate Modern in London, providing regeneration for an area suffering from the decline of industry; it was explored with great initial enthusiasm. The negotiations centred on the prospect of the d'Offay collection: 'pursuing the VA Tech building was the most likely way of acquiring the collection'.⁶⁰ Gradually, however, initial enthusiasm waned and more practical issues were confronted. Firstly, there was concern at the

⁵⁹ Ivan Gaskell, *Vermeer's Wager* (London: Reaktion, 2000), p. 175.

⁶⁰ Board Room Minutes, January 2006.

idea of inaugurating another National Gallery site in Edinburgh, after the failure to establish the Gallery of Scottish Art in Glasgow.⁶¹ Those earlier discussions had revealed the level of resentment in the west that all Scotland's national institutions were located in Edinburgh, despite Glasgow's larger population.⁶² There was also the problem of adding another unconnected site to the overall estates within the city, in an area where there was no guarantee of an audience. Eventually it became clear that the cost of transforming the 'shed' into suitable conditions for the display of art would be enormous, and so attention reverted to the extension at Belford Road.

The prospect was central to collection planning in 2006:

The acquisition of this large and highly important collection is outside the scope of this paper, but were we able to acquire it, it would in one fell swoop transform out of all recognition our holdings of classic contemporary art and put Scotland on the world map as far as this area is concerned. We would still of course need to go on representing **younger artists**. Owing to limited resources over the last fifteen years, this is an area that has regrettably been neglected. There is much catching up to do.⁶³

The anticipated arrival of works in the d'Offay collection was allowing the purchasing policy to concentrate on other areas, in particular, as noted in this 2006 comment, on the field of contemporary works. As a Gallery dedicated to modern art, it can never have a collection that is complete, as the field is constantly expanding. **New** had showcased the works acquired since 1990, but it soon became more apparent which art from that decade would now complete, or at least complement, the Gallery's holdings. Calvocoressi's 2005 proposal to purchase a work by Tracey Emin, *Family Suite* (GMA 4784), contained this explanation: 'In the 90s we devoted much of our acquisition budget to Surrealist art. We are now making strenuous efforts to 'buy back' great works of recent British art, and have recently acquired works by Rachel Whiteread, Mona Hatoum, Damien Hirst and others'.⁶⁴ The following year the GMA noted 'with concern that out of the total NGS purchase grant of £1.26m for 2005-06, only £60,000 – under 5% - had been allocated to the SNGMA, most of which had gone on the acquisition of Mona Hatoum's sculpture, *Slicer*'.⁶⁵ These figures show the disadvantage of the centralised system to the GMA: this had been

⁶¹ This had been permanently abandoned in 1996 after two unsuccessful bids to the National Lottery fund.

⁶² The Scottish Executive were less concerned about this because 'they were intending to spend significant sums of money in the West on sporting facilities for the Commonwealth Games.' Board Room Minutes, January 2006.

⁶³ Board Room Minutes, March 2006

⁶⁴ Minutes of GMA meeting, 8 November 2005.

⁶⁵ Minutes of GMA meeting, 28 February 2006.

Hall's objection when the system had been introduced, although there had been few years when the proportion was quite so low, and on other instances it had benefited. At the same meeting, the priority for the next year was set as: 'either a work of classic modern art, such as de Chirico's *The Death of the Spirit* of 1915... (de Chirico was a yawning gap in the NGS's Surrealist holdings) ... or an important contemporary work from the d'Offay collection, eg. Gerhard Richter, Andy Warhol, Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst'. The mention of de Chirico recalls something of the Godot-like quest for a Picasso or Braque in the early days. At every purchase review, it has been noted that 'de Chirico was a yawning gap': to this day, the Gallery still does not possess a work by de Chirico, demonstrating how difficult it can be to complete a collection.

The central focus of acquisitions, however, was undoubtedly the d'Offay collection. In July 2006, Hartley reported to the Trustees that 'the key to acquiring the collection was to come up with a suitable plan for a specific building [...] The most cost-effective solution for the creation of additional gallery space for contemporary art was to build on to the GMA'.⁶⁶ As so often in the past, this was not easy to achieve. The ongoing negotiations revealed more difficulties facing the Scottish institution. The scale of many of the works owned by d'Offay would require vast storage facilities as well as display space, and the management of a collection of this magnitude would require a great deal of curatorial and conservation time. It became clear that the extra facilities required to manage the acquisition successfully would put an inordinate strain on the SNGMA's resources. The most sensible option was to consider a joint acquisition with the Tate, an institution with far greater resources of space and staff. This was eventually stated in the Corporate Plan 2007 to 2010:

To acquire with the Tate, the Anthony d'Offay collection of modern and contemporary art. The joint acquisition of this collection would help to establish Edinburgh/Scotland as a major, world-class destination for modern art. Nevertheless, it is still recognised within the organisation that modern and contemporary art need more, and more appropriate, space. It should be the next priority once the Portrait Gallery project is complete.⁶⁷

The terms in which the possible GMA extension is referred to here points again to the importance of the gallery's position within the wider structure of the NGS. It has had to wait its turn for a major development project, with the NG and the SNP both passing in front of it in the queue. The security of belonging to a larger organisation can sometimes be offset by the compromises it imposes. The decision to proceed

⁶⁶ Board Room Minutes, July 2006.

⁶⁷ Corporate Plan 2007-2010, Objective 5:1.

jointly with the Tate was not based wholly on the lack of space at the SNGMA but this played a significant role. Had it been possible to secure a building, the whole collection might have been acquired by the SNGMA single-handedly, and would have become a fixed part of the permanent collection.

Exhibitions 2006-07: a compendium of difficult issues

The exhibitions that were held over the two-year period from 2006 to 2007 illustrate several of the dilemmas that modern art presents to the institution of the museum. These practical, theoretical and conceptual dilemmas ranged from the problems of scale that many new works present, the technical difficulties of showing video works, to the problems of conservation arising from the use of non-permanent materials and questions of authenticity of everyday objects.

By the time the Dean was added to the overall NGS estates in 1999, all hopes of a Gallery of Scottish Art had been finally quashed, and attention was directed instead to the serious maintenance requirements at the RSA building on Princes Street.⁶⁸ For some time this had been in a very degraded state, with the foundations in particular causing urgent concern.⁶⁹ The proposed solution to these problems led to the NGS's next major building programme, eventually entitled the 'Playfair project' in honour of the Victorian architect responsible for designing both art institutions on the Mound. The project involved substantial structural work to the RSA building, and saw the addition of a new underground link, which finally connected the NGS and the RSA. The five-year project restored the RSA to a standard fit for hosting important loan exhibitions. The newly equipped venue was intended for use by all the partner Galleries, and the first modern art exhibition took place in the summer of 2006. It featured the work of Ron Mueck, an artist whose name held little public recognition, and the projected visitor numbers were consequently not high. As such, it was a brave choice for the GMA's first exhibition there, and like so much else during these years, was influenced by the d'Offay collection, as most of the works in the exhibition came from that source. The works featured were hyper-realist sculptures of humans, all

⁶⁸ 'The Chairman said the failure of the Glasgow project, though very sad, left the NGS with a clean sheet and the opportunity to take up those projects that had been left aside.' NGS Objectives 1998-2002.

⁶⁹ The building had been erected on a structure of wooden piles. These had become rotten, and would eventually have caused the building to sink into the ground.

perfectly true to life in every minute detail except scale, which varied from truly gigantic to two-thirds life-size to miniature. The RSA building provided an excellent backdrop, allowing the most massive work, *In bed*, of a young girl sitting up in bed, to occupy an entire gallery. The exhibition unexpectedly captured the public imagination, and achieved the highest attendance figures for an exhibition of modern art, almost 130,000 visitors, 157% above the target of 50,000 visitors. It appeared that finally having access to a proper exhibition space at the heart of the city capable of showing large-scale works might encourage greater participation in modern art shows, even when the artist was not known to the public.

After the exhibition the GMA submitted a request to purchase *A Girl*, the massive-scaled hyperrealist baby that had featured in the show. The purchase was subject to some scrutiny because ‘conservation issues still needed to be explored’.⁷⁰

Conservation has taken on an increasingly central role in all museums, with modern art presenting constant new challenges arising from the use of non-traditional materials, which are often not intended to be lasting.⁷¹ The problem with the Mueck sculpture, however, was not simply the material, but the sheer scale. For an institution that was constantly under pressure for space, particularly for storage space, was it justified that one work should require so much? The issue worried some of the Trustees, but John Leighton, who had recently replaced Clifford as Director General, expressed the opinion that the NGS should not avoid purchasing large pieces ‘as there may be a gallery to house such pieces in the future’.⁷² The remark recalls the situation that pertained for so long at Inverleith House referring to a possible imminent expansion. The lesson from those earlier days has been not to be hindered by current lack of space.

⁷⁰ Board Room Minutes, October 2006.

⁷¹ The issue had already been raised when one of Douglas Hall’s earliest proposed acquisitions was for a collage work by Dubuffet in 1963. (Chap. 2, note 44). The uncertainty about that particular work’s durability of material had prevented the acquisition, but artists had continued to use materials that might prove unstable – if the art was to be represented, it became necessary to take risks. Acquiring certain works can entail agreeing to a set of legally-binding obligations regarding the state of perishable materials; the acquisition is not a definitive transferral of ownership, but an ongoing contract.

⁷² Board Room Minutes, October 2006



Figure 27: Ron Mueck, *A Girl*

The Mueck exhibition was followed at the RSA by **Superhumanatural**, a retrospective of works by Douglas Gordon, a Scottish artist with a high international reputation, and therefore one who might be expected to draw in the public. As an exercise in transforming the same gallery space, the change from the Mueck to the Gordon exhibition was exemplary. The space was almost unrecognisable when given over to enormous screens showing some of the video installations for which Gordon was most renowned. A Gordon exhibition had been planned for some time, but Hartley had advised waiting until the RSA building was available, to ensure the works were installed to their best advantage. Several reviews noted how the setting added to the atmosphere of the exhibition. Waldemar Januszczak, for example, wrote:

What this event boasts, you see, and what other displays at the Tate and elsewhere have lacked, is true atmosphere: proper Scottish spookiness. From the moment you enter the posh portico of the Royal Scottish Academy and pass the death masks of the notorious grave-robbers ... you are plunged into an evocative Edinburgh twilight that allows for a weirder and better understanding of Gordon's intentions.⁷³

The exhibition extended beyond the Gallery walls: there were displays also at Inverleith House and two other sites inside the Botanic, including the old wash-house, which held an installation entitled *Plato's Cave*, recalling the origins of art. More spectacularly, the exhibition also extended outside the Gallery with the projection of an intense red light onto the statue of Queen Victoria above the RSA

⁷³ Waldemar Januszczak, 'It's funny, it's clever, and Douglas Gordon's work makes spooky sense in Edinburgh's gothic heart', *Sunday Times*, Culture section, 19 November 2006.

portico, giving the whole building a supernatural glow and making part of the artistic experience available to the public even without entering the Gallery. Despite much critical acclaim, however, this exhibition failed to capture the public's attention.

Magnus Linklater reflected on this, pondering the notion of conceptual art:

Perhaps ... it is because conceptual art is still too new a phenomenon to be fully accepted. But it is 30 years now since Carl André's pile of bricks outside The Tate excited derision and fascination in almost equal measure. Since then we have become used to the wild, the eccentric and the frankly baffling. But the gap between the opinion-formers and the wider audience has never been fully bridged. The Morningside couple with whom I toured the Gordon show at the RSA came out with comments that seemed to have changed little over the years: "Can't understand it... what's he trying to say... is this what they call art?"⁷⁴

The 'gap between opinion-formers and the wider audience' is the same one Hall had in mind in 1973 when admitting that the SNGMA 'for the foreseeable future' would have to take account of the tastes not only of the opinion-formers but also of the typical Morningside couple. The Gordon exhibition proved that the gap had not yet narrowed. If visitor numbers are taken as a measure of success, the general public showed little interest in the show, while critics were generally very impressed:

Douglas Gordon's retrospective show **Superhumanatural** is big, brave and intoxicatingly beautiful. It is also deeply engaging and arguably more significant than any current contemporary art show anywhere in the UK. It is probably the most important exhibition of contemporary art I have ever seen in Scotland.⁷⁵

Such an evident disconnect between the general public and most critics has remained part of the standard response to modern art since the time of the SNGMA's inception, and has always been taken into account by the institution. Galleries of Modern Art are alone among museums in having to justify repeatedly their engagement with the very art that their title requires of them. This was a rare example of the SNGMA hosting 'the most important exhibition of contemporary art ... in Scotland'; contemporary art was generally better represented in the smaller galleries both in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and increasingly also Dundee. Gordon had reached a level of international acclaim that merited the distinction of being shown by the SNGMA, proving perhaps that the role of the SNGMA is to consolidate reputations more than to form them.

The question remains, however, that for all the critical acclaim, the exhibition was not 'popular', fewer people attended than had been anticipated, and the public's response was largely in line with the 'Morningside couple', giving the lie to Nairne's assertion

⁷⁴ Magnus Linklater, 'Art: Is he talking to you?', *Scotland on Sunday, Review*, 12 Nov 2006.

⁷⁵ Iain Gale, 'Douglas Gordon: Superhuman achievement', *Scotland on Sunday, Review*, 5 November 2006, p. 9. Not all the reviews were positive. Laura Cumming, for example, found little to like: 'once he was good, lately he's not.' *Observer, Review*, 19 November 2006, p. 16.

that the public come away liking what they had thought they wouldn't. The Gordon exhibition had all the features that should have brought success; a Turner prize winner, internationally acclaimed, with strong Scottish connections, the show itself beautifully curated and presented, showing in a central location inside a gallery whose exterior loudly proclaimed its presence. Yet, still the response was lukewarm.

The gallery was not despondent, however, about the impact of the exhibition, commenting: 'It has certainly raised the profile of the NGS's display of contemporary art in Scotland.'⁷⁶ This observation draws attention to the wider frame that is also within the sights of the institution: as a National Gallery, it must maintain a high reputation for all of its constituent roles, and contemporary art was the area least well represented by the SNGMA. The Gordon exhibition was a success if one looks beyond the bare statistic of visitor numbers at the prestige obtained for the institution internationally, and thus demonstrates the limited use these numbers have for evaluating wider aspects of the Gallery's success. All of this was particularly relevant at the time because there was another consultation currently under way about the latest Culture Bill in Scotland. The NGS were concerned that the new Bill might undermine the independence of the Trustees, and they were anxious not to have to justify any exhibition on visitor numbers alone.⁷⁷

Unusually, the Gordon exhibition had given rise to an acquisition prior to the show: in January 2006, the Gallery was offered the opportunity to purchase the next film that Gordon was producing, *Zidane, a 21st Century Portrait*. The justification for this purchase is indicative of change: as well as acknowledging Gordon's high reputation, the request to purchase a video work introduces a new element to the question of typicality, as earlier discussed by Hall and Keiller. The Gallery already possessed an installation work of Gordon's (*List of Names* (GMA 4335), purchased in 2000), but the argument was put forward that 'Gordon's video projections are some of his most visually arresting and popular works...'⁷⁸ The concept of typicality has become more difficult to contain, as artists now work in different media; in order to represent an artist, it may be necessary to have several works in various media. The expanding

⁷⁶ Tim Cornwell, 'The show the critics loved but the crowds shunned', *Scotsman*, 13 January 2007.

⁷⁷ 'We believe that the independence of the Board of Trustees may be compromised by the level of ministerial control suggested, thus challenging the current principle which is based on the delegation of powers to the Board.' Discussion Paper on Culture (Scotland) Bill Consultation.

⁷⁸ Board Room Minutes, July 2006.

categories of art require constant updating of the museum's approach to collecting, as well as to storage, conservation and display.

The final exhibition for the SNGMA in 2006 was held in the Gallery's own premises; it illustrates the complex issues of display for so much modern art. The exhibition was entitled **Off the Wall**, and included many of the works from the permanent collection that were not made to hang on the wall, the title alluding to this defining feature. The general feeling was of a very light-hearted exhibition – one reviewer referred to a 'fairground feel' – and it proved popular with children, recalling some of the early Christmas shows held at Inverleith House. The inclusion of Martin Creed's *Work No. 370 Balls* (GMA 4762), an installation of over 800 different balls of varying sizes and resembling a massive ball-park, added to the carnival atmosphere.



Figure 28: Martin Creed, *Work No. 370 Balls*

The constraints of the gallery frame, however, soon required that the work be cordoned off, not from any institutional strictness, but because parts of the exhibit were being thrown into adjacent rooms and damaging other displays. It is difficult to predict accurately what factors to take into account when preparing installation works

for display, and the gallery must remain ‘flexible’ in its displays. The **Off the Wall** exhibition was still showing when a new Head of Conservation was appointed at the NGS, Jacqueline Ridge. In an early interview she spoke of the challenges posed by many contemporary installation pieces, such as the Creed Balls. She recounted a conversation with the artist about his selection process and her concern about how to address the problems of replacing ones that might deflate or lose their shape.⁷⁹ This demonstrates the wide range of responsibilities for conservators working with modern art, requiring not only technical conservation skills but also a philosophical sensitivity to the conceptual notions embodied in works of art. In a contemporary re-working of the conundrum of the ship of Theseus, would new balls constitute a newly created artwork, or would the installation retain its authenticity if some of the balls were replaced? These are difficult questions that many contemporary artworks raise; as long as the works remain in private hands they can be left unanswered, but because of museums’ greater accountability they have to formalize their response to such questions. They must weigh up the duty to ‘conserve’ with the value of the concept embodied in the artwork, particularly when there is a conflict between the two.

A different set of issues arose with the main summer exhibition, a retrospective of the English land-artist, Richard Long, entitled **Richard Long: Walking and Marking**. In stark contrast to **Off the Wall**, many of the works for this exhibition were created directly on the walls. In several rooms he created his well-known mud paintings, vast swirling compositions made using locally collected mud thrown onto the gallery wall and then worked into complex patterns by the artist. These works can be kept *in situ* - there are many examples in galleries throughout the world - but the ones produced for this exhibition were only kept for the duration of the exhibition, after which the walls were painted over and returned to their neutral state.

Once again, the spatial properties of the GMA contributed positively to the exhibition:

The geography of the gallery’s first floor – arranged around one long, narrow corridor – has allowed for a tremendous vista from one end to the other; walking in the wilderness, Long has been known to identify reference points on both

⁷⁹ *Herald*, Arts section, 14 April 2007: ‘It was very interesting talking to Martin about the balls, because I wanted to know how important each choice was, and which he had rejected. It transpired that he was very serious and exact about them. He rejected certain balls for a reason. However, it will be interesting to see what we do when they start losing their shape or deflating.’

horizons, keeping them in view in order to maintain a perfectly straight line. Here, two of his own works become those reference points. And so our journey through the exhibition becomes a formal walk in its own right.⁸⁰

The GMA again had use of the RSA during the Festival period to mount a major exhibition of works by Andy Warhol, **Andy Warhol: A Celebration of Life ... and Death**. The sponsorship package with the Bank of Scotland for this was the most generous the Gallery had been granted. A press release in February 2007 announced a two-year sponsorship from the Bank of Scotland for £400,000, ‘the biggest ever sponsorship of modern art in Scotland’.⁸¹ Under the terms of this agreement, the Warhol exhibition was to be followed the next year with a major Beuys exhibition. Both of these exhibitions were composed mainly of works from the d’Offay collection, but the funding allowed the Gallery to put together a rich programme of events relating to the exhibition that added much to public appreciation of the art. The Clore Education Suite in the National Gallery Complex was transformed into a ‘Festival Factory’ modelled on Andy Warhol’s Factory in New York, and various other activities were provided for children and adults alike. It had all the trappings of a blockbuster show and was very popular, with attendance figures high. At the same time, it was also well-received critically. Reviews complimented the interesting curatorial layout, and most commentators noted the variety and depth of the works on display.⁸²



Figure 29: RSA building with Campbell's Soup Cans advertising Warhol exhibition

⁸⁰ Catriona Black, Sunday Herald, 1 July 2007, available at www.artandphilosophy.com/061217.html. [accessed 28 May 2011]

⁸¹ Official press release, February 2007.

⁸² Richard Dormant, ‘There’s more to Warhol than soup and soap’, *Daily Telegraph*, 7 August 2007: ‘Today, Warhol is widely considered to have been one of the most important artists of the 20th century and, along with Picasso and Duchamp, among the most influential. To understand why, just visit the huge retrospective being held in the stately galleries of the Royal Scottish Academy building in Edinburgh ... this summer... [the thematic display] – crucially – helps us to interpret the work for our own time.’

What provoked the most comment, however, was the publicity generated by decorating the columns of the august RSA building with giant Campbell's Soup Cans: as a way of capturing the public's attention, it was outstanding. The success of this exhibition illustrates the possibility of achieving both popular and critical success: clever marketing and innovative educational projects helped generate interest in the show, but the show itself provided a valuable artistic experience, to be enjoyed at many levels.

The third exhibition mounted by the SNGMA during the summer of 2007 was of works on paper by one of the great figures of 20th century art, Picasso. **Picasso: works on paper** demonstrated the value of works in a museum's collection as an exchange currency. The NGS had been reluctant to lend a particular Impressionist work to an exhibition at the Nationalgalerie in Stuttgart; in order to secure the loan, the Stuttgart institution offered to lend their collection of Picasso works on paper to the NGS. This found space in the exhibition rooms of the Dean Gallery, and with the addition of a few other works, formed Scotland's first major Picasso exhibition.

In this way, the summer of 2007 allowed the SNGMA to show the full range of its capacity. With one exhibition of a contemporary artist, Richard Long, one blockbuster of a late twentieth century icon, Andy Warhol, and an extensive display of works by one of the twentieth century's great masters, Pablo Picasso, the institution was fulfilling its remit to provide the people of Scotland with a wide ranging selection of modern art.

Calvocoressi's departure

Before this intense summer programme had got under way, however, and before any definitive arrangements had been reached over the d'Offay acquisition, Calvocoressi announced that he would be resigning from the position he had held for almost twenty years to move to the Henry Moore Foundation. The announcement naturally provoked much comment and reflection on his achievements over the past twenty years. Iain Gale managed ingeniously to incorporate his assessment of Calvocoressi's contribution into a comprehensive account of what was currently on view at the SNGMA, taking as its starting point a small exhibition on display in the Keiller

library, **Dada Reviews**: ‘There is a well-worn axiom that great history is written by what seem to be the least significant of actions, and if you want proof just visit the deceptively modest exhibition currently showing in the Dean Gallery library in Edinburgh’. He described the unquestionable importance of the Dada movement for art in the 20th century, and drew attention to the unique opportunity afforded at the Dean Gallery where one could then walk from that small exhibition straight into the rooms containing major works of the movement. He then tied in the **Off the Wall** exhibition at the SNGMA, suggesting that this showed the continuing influence of Dada on artists working in the 21st century. He concluded his cleverly-constructed description of all that was currently on offer at the SNGMA by acknowledging Calvocoressi’s central role in creating this rich and coherent collection:

It is fair to say that this would not have been accomplished without the director, Richard Calvocoressi, who having arrived here in 1988, sadly leaves his post in May. Calvocoressi’s tenure has coincided precisely with the growth of the gallery’s Dada and Surrealist collection and whatever future blockbuster shows come and go, it will remain as lasting testimony to his achievement.⁸³

Calvocoressi had identified the possibility of giving Scotland’s modern art collection a clear focus, and had pursued this aim through to a very satisfactory conclusion, creating a Surrealism Study Centre of international standing. Gale’s description goes beyond relating the simple fact of acquiring such a high-quality collection, however, and reveals how well the overall ensemble had been orchestrated to combine into a seamless whole. The collection was outstandingly rich in the field of Dada and Surrealism, but it also offered insights into everything that followed. The value of the collection lay also in how well it was used, as a tool to illustrate so many of the avenues that opened out from the Surrealist moment. This proves Douglas Hall’s earlier assertion that a collection is only as good as the curators who are in charge of it, and during Calvocoressi’s Directorship, a high standard of curating had been carefully nurtured.⁸⁴

The intense summer exhibitions programme stood as testament that Calvocoressi had overseen the growth of an excellent team: at the time of his departure there were seven full-time curators and two part-time. The collection had developed into one of international standing, the organisation was capable of producing major research and

⁸³ Iain Gale, ‘Dada: It’s the Dada of them all’, *Scotland on Sunday*, Review, 28 January 2007.

⁸⁴ At the 50th anniversary ‘In conversation’ with the three Directors of the SNGMA, Calvocoressi declared that the most important work of the Director of an institution like the SNGMA was to give responsibility to young curators, to enable them to develop.

stimulating exhibitions. The only area where he had not managed to achieve the success he would have liked was with the building. The Estates Strategy report in May 2007 stated:

There is a pressing requirement to create more space for modern and contemporary art ...

In contrast to city centre buildings, neither the GMA nor the Dean were originally designed for the display of art and, as the nature of contemporary art changes in its scale and its variety of media, it has become clear to the NGS, as it has in similar circumstances to art institutions around the world, that no traditional building is likely to form an entirely appropriate environment.

... we will further exploit the grounds and create a special space comparable to suburban attractions such as the Beyeler in Basel and the Louisiana in Copenhagen.⁸⁵

As throughout the whole history, finding more, and better suited, space remained the greatest challenge to the institution. The reference to the Louisiana recalls the earlier ambitions of the 1970s: the ideal represented by that institution still resonated with the Scottish case, and still evoked the same notions of a peripheral location somehow making a virtue out of the tranquil setting. In many ways, the SNGMA had moved beyond the Louisiana since the first comparisons made with it during the 1960s. It now covered a much broader range of 20th century art (the Danish museum chose to concentrate on art post-1945) and had some exceptional holdings in certain key areas, but in terms of its physical presence within the city, it had still not found a way (or not been allocated adequate funds) to exploit the proximity to the city combined with the extensive parkland around it.

On his departure, Calvocoressi issued a small, but sincere, warning note:

[He] said the galleries had changed beyond recognition in 20 years, with the addition of the Dean Gallery and new departments such as marketing, development, and IT.

He added: "There is a danger that the artistic side can be overshadowed by the non-curatorial departments. I don't think we've fallen into that trap, but it needs to be watched."⁸⁶

As a parting shot, it has continued to resonate up to the present, as financial constraints make the business of running the Gallery more and more challenging.

⁸⁵ Included in Board Room Minutes, June 2007.

⁸⁶ Tim Cornwell, 'Hamilton Finlay is 'greatest Scots artist'', *The Scotsman*, 9 May 2007.

CHAPTER 6

The 21st Century – Gallery without walls

New Director – new role

Among the many summaries of achievements-so-far prompted by the change at the top for only the second time in the SNGMA's existence, one concluded with a rhetorical question: 'Richard Calvocoressi is a hard act to follow, having built the gallery from a reasonable provincial collection into one of the prime destinations for modern art, particularly Surrealism, in Europe. How, as they say, do you follow that?'¹

Part of the answer was to alter the definition of the role. The change turned out to be more radical than simply appointing a new person. The Director of the SNGMA, the title of the post vacated by Calvocoressi, was re-designated 'Director of Modern and Contemporary Art' at NGS. The shift in focus implied by this change represented a weakening of the previously strong connection between the Director and one specific collection within the organisation. The new title removed the direct link with the single institution: the incoming director would no longer appear to be so intimately connected with only one part of the institution, and theoretically would therefore have influence over the whole organisation. Coincidentally, the timing of the new appointment fell early in the term of office of the Director-General of the NGS, John Leighton, who had arrived at the Scottish institution in 2006. Thus Leighton was still new to his post, just as Timothy Clifford had been when Calvocoressi arrived. Leighton too, like his predecessor, had undertaken a thorough assessment of the management structure of the organisation, and the change to the Directorship at the GMA revealed his strategy for the overall structure, demonstrating his aspiration to unite the three component parts (the NG, the SNPG and the GMA) rather than highlight differences. The redefinition of responsibilities pointed to a different interpretation of the collections of the individual institutions as one common resource

¹ Iain Gale, 'No stone unturned', *Scotland on Sunday*, Review, 16 December 2007.

that was not divided according to arbitrary notions of chronology or genre. This is in line with much current thinking within museums generally; the old assumptions about classification by period or by school are no longer inevitable within the museum, and new ways of ordering collections and displaying them are being adopted.² Leighton had already broken with the arrangements of his predecessor in choosing to locate his office at the Dean Gallery, instead of at the National Gallery, which had been Clifford's domain. This indicated an intention to recalibrate the balance of priorities within the National Galleries: the move favoured greater integration of the business activities of the institution by placing the Director General at the heart of the administration, all of whose offices were now united at the Belford Road campus.

The person appointed to the new role by the selection panel of Trustees was Simon Groom. Unlike Calvocoressi, he had had no previous connection to the Gallery, but had worked as a curator at Kettle's Yard in Cambridge and at the Tate in Liverpool, where he held particular responsibility for contemporary Asian art. In describing his aesthetic and museological influences, Groom highlighted the formative time he had spent at Kettle's Yard:

The ethos of the collection and that of its creator, Jim Ede, onetime curator at the Tate, was that you cannot separate art from the rest of life... The real lesson of Kettle's Yard though was that something as humble as a stone actually had a place in the world. Every single thing I've done since then has been about finding the relevance between different worlds - literature, science performance, poetry, things as apparently unconnected as art and accounting.³

The comparison between Kettle's Yard and the SNGMA is an interesting and informative one. Kettle's Yard has all the advantages of a small collection, encouraging an intimate engagement with art that has been carefully selected according to the vision of one individual. It operates in the context of the small town that is dominated by the university. The main part of the Gallery was the home of the founder, Jim Ede, thus truly fulfilling the criteria for a small, domestic interior that Cursiter might have admired. The art collected is carefully chosen to suit the interior. This is the beauty of small museums; they can achieve perfection in their restricted remit.⁴ Groom may have hoped to reproduce the qualities of the small, intimate space

² See Hooper-Greenhill, Chap.1, 'Classification in the museum has taken place within an ethos of obviousness.' p. 5.

³ Iain Gale, 'No Stone Unturned', *Scotland on Sunday*, 16 December 2007.

⁴ It recalls Douglas Hall's description of how a small extension to Inverleith House might have worked, as a very beautiful, but restricted, gallery.

of Kettle's Yard within the larger and more complex set of requirements at the SNGMA.

The first reports of Groom's appointment were subdued in their support, although the *Observer* saw great potential in his possible engagement with the wider international field of contemporary art:

Many Edinburgh art-worlders hoped that a curator of international standing would take over the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, but the job has fallen to Simon Groom from Kettle's Yard and Tate Liverpool. Groom curated the excellent show of young Chinese art in Liverpool this spring, but is he powerful enough to resist showcasing any more of Anthony d'Offay's private collection (Warhol, Beuys etc) in the Dean Gallery or the SNGMA? If he is and forays further abroad in contemporary art, perhaps they can start calling it the Edinburgh International Art Festival.⁵

The reference to 'showcasing d'Offay's private collection' is a fair representation of the Gallery's policy over the previous few years. The privileged access to the d'Offay collection had allowed the gallery to put on certain exhibitions such as the Andy Warhol, and the Joseph Beuys, but these were still well-curated, well researched exhibitions that made a positive contribution to the Gallery's programme. Nevertheless, the comment pinpointed the difficulty facing Groom. His arrival coincided with a time when the institution was about to undertake a truly momentous leap in terms of the number of works in the collection. Groom had had no input into the process before arriving, yet he now had to oversee its realisation. Those who were sceptical about the d'Offay collaboration presented the task that confronted Groom as a test of his independence: such comments can only have added to the pressure for the new Director. His job now was quite different to that undertaken by his predecessors: their remit had been more clearly defined as beginning and then building up a national collection. Their first duty was to establish the institution as an essential component of the national cultural fabric by collecting 20th century art and presenting that art through exhibitions. Groom, on the other hand, arrived at a time when the collection was well formed, with particular strengths and a decent range of works of all periods, albeit with a few major gaps still outstanding. The institution was by now settled in its two-part venue, however awkward this venue was, and there was a team of experienced curators well established in their roles. It was therefore less obvious what his essential contribution ought to be, how he might leave his individual imprint on the institution.

⁵ Laura Cumming, 'Edinburgh Art', *Observer*, Review, 12 August 2007.

He responded diplomatically to the press comments, focussing on the new definition of the role:

It signals a shift in ways of thinking about working across all the gallery sites.... We have the Dean, the Gallery of Modern Art, the National Portrait Gallery and the National Gallery, and it's about breaking out of the kind of territorial nature of those institutions and recognising there are ways of working across the collection, chronologically, so you can put modern art in the National Gallery for example.

"It's a different and very healthy way of thinking."

He added: "In a way, it's an expansion of the remit, if anything. I welcome that - I want to make contemporary art relevant, not just a shocking aberration."⁶

The notion of breaking territorial and chronological barriers was indeed novel within the NGS. Since the institution of the SNGMA, there has been little overlap between the various components. The original remit dating back to Cursiter had sought to confer a distinctive identity on the GMA in keeping with its 'modern' role. For Groom to suggest that the breaking down of those territorial and chronological barriers would extend the remit and therefore allow the institution to make contemporary art relevant implies that the previous distinctive space had so far failed to do so. It is not made clear, however, precisely how the closer collaboration would assist the process. The desire to make contemporary art relevant had already exercised previous Directors of the SNGMA: as art practices have evolved and become more diversified, the task has never become easier, remaining an elusive ambition. The question arises whether in fact the institution has been too timid at acknowledging and representing modern art's shocking quality. It can be criticised for consistently shying away from the most controversial and aberrant art. At the same time, however, it might be argued that such art should not be shown in a national institution precisely because the frame of the institution would stifle the ability to shock, making any aberrant qualities less powerful. In any case, it remains an area where the national institution does not participate, undermining its claim to represent all the important aspects of modern art. There is an inherent tension between the institution, which seeks to encourage a positive encounter with art, and the desire of some artists to confront contemporary reality in a deliberately shocking way. By selecting only the art that does not shock (or at least not too much), the institution is denying the public access to much contemporary art production, even

⁶ Phil Miller, 'Counting the cost of art', *Herald*, 17 December 2007.

though the public may not want to have that access. How it applies its role as gatekeeper needs to be confronted. Groom's aspiration, "to make contemporary art relevant, not just a shocking aberration", would seem to imply that he does not intend to embrace the shocking any more than his predecessors, despite his supposedly wider remit. The institution has always tried to present modern art in as palatable a way as possible out of fear of antagonising its public, which is still not widely committed to the cause of modern art. Groom's comments give little indication that he wants to go further.

Since taking up his post, however, the opportunities for putting any dynamic vision into practice have been relatively few. The SNPG has been closed for redevelopment since 2009, but will surely offer interesting potential for cross-fertilisation with the GMA. Its remit is not limited to a time frame, but to a genre, although that too is now being interpreted more widely as 'Portrait of a Nation'; as its collections grow, they will naturally include works of contemporary art, thus proving the logic of the new title. The energies of the National Gallery have recently been directed towards the major fund-raising campaigns to save the Titians (see below), but there too, there has been closer collaboration. One small example curated by Keith Hartley in 2010, entitled **Confrontations**, placed the Otto Dix painting, *Nude Girl on a Fur*, of 1932 (GMA 2195) alongside the Lucas Cranach painting, *Venus and Cupid*, of c.1537 (NG 1942), inviting interesting and innovative reflections on the works, and on how our perception of them is altered by their juxtaposition. The intention is to produce a series of these **Confrontations**, as a way to show the works from the permanent collection in a new light, and make visitors pay more detailed attention to the works presented in this way.

The insertion of modern art into galleries dedicated to historical collections has become a popular trend, with even the august halls of the Louvre receiving commissioned works from artists such as Anselm Kiefer and Cy Twombly, and with the success of exhibitions such as the 2008 **Picasso and the Masters**, juxtaposing modern art with its antecedents. Such trends indicate growing tension with the previously accepted separation of art into such distinct chronological categories, and further justify the re-defining of Groom's role. The recognition that chronology only represents one of several methods of classification has created greater variety in how art is displayed within galleries. This encourages a more creative exploration of

possible juxtapositions, which is also useful for investigating new ways to revitalise permanent collections. New 'confrontations' can be very effective at capturing the public's attention and can bring fresh insights to many works within these permanent collections.

In early interviews, Groom avoided committing himself to one specific direction for the future of the institution, declaring more generally that his primary ambition was to raise the purchase fund available to him.⁷ He made a strong case for the regenerative power of the visual arts:

What we can do is make the case for the validity and vitality that visual arts plays within culture generally, for the identity of the nation, for a new image of the nation, for revitalisation. You need to think about the way culture has always led regeneration, economically and politically. If you look at Liverpool [which is to be European City of Culture next year], the Britart fad when Blair got into power, all those confluences of power, money and politics - that has got to be leveraged here.⁸

Groom's experience in Liverpool had clearly informed his opinions about the transformative power of cultural projects. The notion of regeneration through culture had been mentioned during the brief exploration of the VA Tech building, but it is a concept that sits uncomfortably within the Edinburgh context. There are areas of severe deprivation within the city in need of revitalisation, but the Belford Road setting of the GMA does not lend itself to easy connections with those communities, and it is therefore more difficult to envisage the GMA fulfilling this role on that site: the potential regenerative strength there lies more in its offer of spiritual enrichment through the natural surroundings in which it is set. This continues to produce a tension between the aims of the institution and the setting in which it finds itself. The institution's physical frame still acts as an impediment to the full implementation of its intentions.

He explained how he felt the institution should progress:

⁷ Phil Miller, *The Herald*, 17 December 2007: 'He says the modern art collections of the national galleries are "authoritative" but is keen to improve them even more.' 'I think, as any collection, it has great strengths and areas where you would like to improve,' Dr Groom said. 'I think one of the main challenges to me is to increase the amount [of money] we have for the collection. "At the moment it is pitiful for a national gallery. We are a national gallery, we are collecting for the nation. But if you think that one Warhol was sold at auction a couple of months ago for \$78m (£38m) and here, across all the sites we have £1.2m - and that's including the National Gallery, collecting Old Masters and all that kind of thing.''

⁸ *The Herald*, 17 December 2007.

While Groom is clearly aware that great strides have been made by the National Galleries of Scotland over the past decade, he believes that there are still possibilities in how they use the collection. "Firstly, I obviously want to add to it," he says. "Specifically work by artists working in Scotland. We need to be able to buy them as they're on the rise. I also want to attract international artists across to Scotland. Culture is vital to the economy of small nations. A nation is only confident when it engages on an international level."⁹

Groom's remark, that he wanted to concentrate resources specifically on the contemporary Scottish collection, was the most explicit expression of this intention by any of the Directors. Both of his predecessors had in fact worked hard to avoid being restricted to, or having to favour, Scottish artists. Groom, however, now took over a collection that was strong enough in international art that he could afford to focus primarily on Scottish art without risking charges of narrow parochialism, and clearly his ambition to attract international artists to Scotland counteracts any narrowness of vision. He was helped in this also by the vigorous state of Scottish art. As Keith Hartley had indicated in 2000, Scottish art was flourishing, and much of the success was in an international context more than a local one. The imminent arrival of the d'Offay collection also meant that so many of the gaps of 'historic' art from the 1970s and 80s in the collection would now be filled, allowing the institution for the first time to focus its attention on building up the contemporary, 'local' collection. This increased centrality of Scottish contemporary art may well prove to be the defining contribution of Groom's Directorship.

The d'Offay acquisition announced

The final arrangements for the acquisition of the d'Offay collection were in place by February 2008, and a press conference was held at the end of the month. The announcement of the final scheme was greeted with much approval, with d'Offay being hailed as a great philanthropist. Some newspapers pointed out that the philanthropic gesture had brought considerable material gain to the donor: he had received a payment of around £26.5m for the works (equal to the amount he had paid for them), and an agreement with the Inland Revenue to write off tax liabilities amounting to £14m. Nevertheless, the works were conservatively valued at £125m, so it was still an arrangement that greatly benefited the Galleries. On the whole, the

⁹ Iain Gale, 'No Stone Unturned', *Scotland on Sunday*, Review, 16 December 2007.

Scottish press coverage was more favourable than the English. The *Sunday Times* quoted Waldemar Januszczak's tepid response:

The whole thing is being over-hyped. It's not a collection that will radically change the nation's holdings. There was such a collection – Charles Saatchi's collection of modern British art from the Damien Hirst era – but the Tate let it slip through their fingers... This is second best. There are some interesting things in it but it isn't going to fill the chasm.¹⁰

This comment might be accurate with reference to the Tate's collections, but in the context of the Edinburgh institution, the acquisition really did 'radically change the nation's holdings', as Calvocoressi had always recognised. So many of the names that had been on SNGMA wishlists for the past twenty years were now included within the collection, thus freeing the institution to be able to collect more contemporary works. The difference in impact on the two institutions prompts reflection. In a 1989 volume, entitled *The Economics of Art Museums*, economists and curators discussed their experiences of the art market and how it affects museums. Ashton Hawkins of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art reflected on the changing nature of philanthropy: 'One motivation for people to give large collections in the early days at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was that the giver was shaping the entire nature of the collection...'¹¹ This comment seems to resonate with d'Offay's motivation. He was initially committed to the idea of the SNGMA single-handedly taking over the whole of his collection; this would have had a much greater impact on the smaller institution than it eventually had on the combined Tate/SNGMA. Within the Scottish institution, however, it has still had the type of major impact referred to by Hawkins; it has shaped the Gallery's holdings of works from the 1960s onwards, providing precisely the works by artists such as Warhol or Richter that the Gallery had not been able to purchase sooner because they were still catching up with the earlier part of the century, and which were now far out of its financial reach. A smaller institution offers more opportunity for philanthropy to make a difference, something that d'Offay recognised throughout.

The full terms of the acquisition were viewed with concern in some quarters:

So we have a stupendous gift or a millstone; potentially both. And d'Offay has an unprecedented showcase for his collection, of which he is *ex officio* curator. He no longer has the crushing expense of storage and insurance, no longer owns work for which he cannot possibly have house space and thus can never see. He no longer

¹⁰ 'From vampire to Mr Nice Guy with a £125m splash of art', *The Sunday Times*, 2 March 2008.

¹¹ Martin Feldstein (ed.), *The Economics of Art Museums*, (Chicago, Ill.; London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p 33.

owns unsold stock, as some have witheringly implied. And if you admire the art, or the gesture of forgoing millions to set it all before the British public, then d'Offay is a saint. How many ways can he have his cake and eat it?

A senior curator once told me that only a forensic accountant could judge the morality of this deal. But the rest of us may judge it in other ways. That it is a blue-chip collection is beyond doubt (along with the scaly truth that it could not otherwise have been afforded), so it inevitably represents the over-represented.

Warhol, Beuys, Mapplethorpe, Hirst: their reputations hardly need enlargement, which is why British museums felt the lack of such names in their collections in the first place. Given that vicious circularity, the question is therefore whether the artists themselves are well represented.¹²

Despite the sceptical analysis of the terms of the acquisition, the article recognizes that the collection contains works by the big names of the latter part of the 20th century, who, precisely because of their fame, are out of reach of the budgets of the national institutions, yet who are the artists whom one expects to find in those national institutions. From this perspective, the acquisition has clearly been beneficial for them, although Cumming reminds the reader that there is still the question of the quality of the works themselves, even if the artists are important. This is the issue that has raised most concerns about the acquisition: the vast number of works suggests that inevitably the quality will be patchy. The attention to detail when purchasing 725 works can never be as intense as when purchasing a single work.

The continuing role that d'Offay was given as *ex officio* curator of the Artist Rooms project raises the question of 'buying' renewed influence in the art world through his continuing connection with the collection.¹³ It can be read as a generous gesture of this retired dealer to offer his time and expertise to the project. Equally, it can be interpreted as an unfair position of authority being given to someone who lies outside the direct responsibility and accountability of the institution. He still gains prestige from his active engagement with the project, and continues to wield some influence without the full responsibility for commercial success that he had as a dealer. As Cumming suggests, many have viewed this as inappropriate. Similar cases of wealthy patrons becoming actively involved in decisions within museums were more frequent in the heyday of major philanthropy. MoMA in New York was very heavily influenced by its wealthy benefactors, in particular the Rockefeller family.¹⁴ In the case of the d'Offay acquisition, however, over the long term the gain must surely be

¹² Laura Cumming, 'Give them some personal space', *The Observer*, Review, 15 March 2009.

¹³ The term 'Artist Rooms' derives from the idea of showing the works of an artist monographically in order to gain a deeper understanding of that artist's work. This concept is central to d'Offay's curatorial vision for the scheme.

¹⁴ Discussed in Feldstein. See also Kirk Varnedoe, 'The Evolving Torpedo: Changing Ideas of the Collection of Painting and Sculpture of The Museum of Modern Art', in Ross, pp. 13-73.

for the institution, in the expansion of the permanent collection. *The Economics of Art Museums* makes the point that most American collections were formed in this way:

American museum collections were formed above all by gifts, not purchases. The value of works of art given or bequeathed to museums – that is works of art chosen by collectors and donated – must be vastly, vastly greater than the amount of money given or bequeathed to museums for purchases, whether earmarked endowments or contributions for purchases – that is money spent by the curators and directors for works they chose.¹⁵

The luxury of being able to purchase precisely those works most suited to a collection has rarely been open to museum Directors, either because of price or because of availability. D’Offay has retained some influence over how his collections are managed in the short term, but this is a finite arrangement, while the works themselves will remain permanently in the collection of the Tate and the SNGMA, ensuring a long-term benefit for the institutions. His continuing connection with the scheme has already led to further donations: in the summer of 2010 the main display at the SNGMA was of Robert Therrien’s works, and the artist created a new piece for this display, **Stacked Plates**, which he then donated to the Artist Rooms collection. This was a result of d’Offay’s diplomatic nurturing of relations with the artist. It is a welcome additional source of new acquisitions to the collection, although it is a process that needs delicate handling. The reasons behind the original reluctance of national galleries to accept gifts from living artists are still valid: in particular, the risk of artists furthering their own careers by some judicious gifts to authoritative institutions. This is why all acquisitions still have to be agreed by the Board of Trustees, who take advice from curators but must always act in the long-term interests of the institution.

The press announcement of the acquisition emphasised the innovative nature of the project, in particular the touring programme. This aspect had assumed greater relevance during the negotiations when it had become apparent that the SNGMA was not likely to be able to afford a major extension. Leighton, soon after taking up his post as Director General, had begun to talk in terms of a ‘gallery without walls’. He turned the lack of a building into a positive advantage: ‘In the past, people got too worked up about the fabric of the buildings. We should be ambitious about bringing

¹⁵ Feldstein, p 28.

international contemporary art into Scotland and use it as a catalyst to encourage both artists and people everywhere in their appreciation of art.’¹⁶

The decision to proceed jointly with the Tate, and to create a touring programme of exhibitions, arose primarily from the failure to secure an extension to the SNGMA, but in fact it resonates with the recommendations of an important study into museum collections instigated by the Museums Association in 2004. Their initial report, entitled *Collections for the Future*, highlighted ‘the need for museums to make better use of their stored collections’.¹⁷ One of the recommendations was for more joint ownership of objects. In the case of modern art, there is much to recommend this approach, given the high costs involved. The SNGMA had already collaborated with the Tate for the purchase of Miró’s *Head of a Catalan Peasant* (GMA 4252), although there was clearly a difference of scale in the administration of the joint purchase of 725 works. The size of the acquisition raises inevitable questions about the underlying logic to the process of collecting. An institution committed to collecting modern art will naturally have to continue expanding its collection to incorporate the latest trends, and will almost inevitably find that gaps have formed in the collection as certain artists of the recent past have risen in stature without the Gallery having collected them. Historically the primary function of a museum or art gallery was ‘to collect and to preserve’: the NGS still puts this first in its mission statement. There comes a point, however, at which the question of how to handle an ever-increasing number of objects has to be addressed. The Artist Rooms ‘permanent’ programme of temporary exhibitions may become a useful example of one way to confront the problem.

The traditional solution to an expansion of the collection has been to build further extensions. The history of the Scottish institution has demonstrated, however, how difficult it is to achieve success in this area. The NGS has never been able to exert enough political pressure to push through plans for an extension; even the prospect of this large addition to its collection was not sufficient to force the appropriate

¹⁶ ‘D’Offay modern art collection to star in gallery without walls’, *The Times*, 28 June 2007: ‘John Leighton came up with the idea of a roving gallery, claiming that it would not be enough to “parachute in an international resource” and confine it to “an Edinburgh basement”.’

¹⁷ ‘Collaborations between museums with similar collections has practical benefits but is also desirable for more profound reasons. People’s opportunities to engage with museum collections should not be constrained by the location or ownership of those collections. It is an ethical imperative for museums to work together to extend access to their collections.’ Museums Association, *Collections for the Future*, report to the Esmée Fairbairn Association, p. 3.

authorities to support the idea. The Tate, on the other hand, has always been more successful, regularly increasing the space available to it for permanent displays. The trend continues up to the present: despite the enormous extension in the former Bankside power station, created as part of Britain's Millennium projects, and which saw the first separation of the International Modern section from the historic British section, there is work already in progress for a major extension to Tate Modern, still officially scheduled to open in 2012. This has been made possible by the success of the Tate at Bankside; the visitor numbers have well exceeded expectations, and the Tate is now one of London's most visited attractions. Success therefore breeds further success, and the institution can justify another extension within a decade of moving in to its new home. Once again, the disadvantage of the smaller base from which to draw an audience leaves the Edinburgh institution at a severe disadvantage: it cannot refer to visitor numbers in the millions, and therefore is unlikely to be granted funding for an extension, even if such an extension might increase interest in the institution, yet its collection too has grown considerably since the latest addition to the estate in 1999 with the incorporation of the Dean.

Although the comment by Leighton was clearly based on the knowledge that no new extension was likely, his approach points to a creative attempt to find an alternative strategy to the obvious insistence on building ever-bigger spaces to show expanding collections. The possibilities to be explored are also relevant to the institution's greater self-reflexivity, and they raise questions about its essential principles and purpose. One of the most important duties of all national institutions in recent years has been to extend their outreach activities. Outreach is a term used to cover many different fields of engagement. It first entered the NGS's policy-making during the 1980s and 90s, under the Directorship of Timothy Clifford. In those early days, Clifford expanded the reach of the NGS by incorporating two outposts, Duff House in Aberdeenshire and Paxton House in the Borders. Both of these offered locations far from major centres, and therefore extended the geographical reach of the NGS, but they did not offer what is the more widely accepted interpretation of the term 'outreach' today, the social outreach to sections of the community who are not accustomed to visiting galleries. Many outreach activities are now undertaken by the Education Department rather than by the curatorial staff, demonstrating the increasingly complex structure of the organisation, with Education becoming more central in the provision of the core activities. Education has always been less

‘territorial’, and is therefore already better equipped for the new inter-gallery collaboration. The Artist Rooms project has brought the two strands closer together, combining the curatorial with the educational.

Although Groom arrived at an institution that was well established with a healthy collection and well-qualified staff, his task was in many ways more difficult than Hall’s or Calvocoressi’s. Firstly, precisely because the institution was now an established feature on the country’s cultural landscape, many people had fixed ideas about how it should be, and what it should do. As with both his predecessors, Groom arrived at a moment of economic crisis, but with major developments already underway that he has had to oversee: in his case, the d’Offay acquisition. The arrival of the d’Offay collection has given the institution a source of top quality 20th century works, and the bargaining power that such a resource offers as a currency in the trade of exhibition loans, raising the status of the institution. It has also, however, opened the institution up to charges of ceding some artistic control to a wealthy benefactor, a charge that can diminish a public gallery’s reputation for integrity. It will be a test of Groom’s Directorship to see how he guides the institution through the delicate balancing act required by this major acquisition and by its repercussions.

Exhibitions 2008: a full panoply

The main summer exhibition at the SNGMA in 2008 was a major retrospective of Tracy Emin. This exhibition had long been proposed by senior curator Patrick Elliott, but had taken several years to come to fruition, and had entailed a great deal of primary research. In spite of Emin’s fame, this was her first major exhibition in a National Gallery. The exhibition was generally well-received critically, and it brought to the Edinburgh institution some of the glamour of the London contemporary art world. Leighton highlighted the greater impact that such an exhibition has in Edinburgh: ‘This city isn’t London, with its noise. There’s always a risk of things getting lost in London: here’s another Damien Hirst, there’s another Tracey Emin. By billing it as her first retrospective, and showing in Edinburgh, it draws more focus’.¹⁸ It attracted curious visits even from Edinburgh’s ‘Morningside couples’ left unmoved by Douglas Gordon. It could be viewed as fulfilling one of the quintessential criteria

¹⁸ Mike Wade, ‘Buzz of success is reason to smile for John Leighton’, *The Times*, 4 Aug 2008.

for a ‘National’ Gallery of Modern Art exhibition, as it provided the Scottish public with the opportunity to see the full range of an important and internationally acclaimed artist’s work: there is no other institution in Scotland better placed to do this. Opinions on Tracey Emin as an artist were mixed, with several critics failing to be impressed with the works, although many others responded positively.¹⁹ The attendance figures were high, and the public response was engaged, if not always approving. *The Scotsman* reported on an impromptu analysis by four visitors who were interviewed about their experience, and the overwhelming impression was that the exhibition had given them much to think about, an interesting contrast to the bafflement of the ‘Morningside couple’ at the Gordon exhibition.²⁰ Emin herself was delighted at how everything had been arranged, and as a gesture of thanks, gifted her sculpture, *Roman Standard* (GMA 5010), to the Gallery.



Figure 30: Tracey Emin, *Roman Standard*

In August 2008, a Guardian article reported that Groom proposed changing the display strategy at the Dean, in order to create a chronological division between the two galleries, with the Dean showing works from 1900-1945 and the GMA carrying the story forward through the art of the post-war period up to the present day.²¹ Although this proposal did not proceed, it signalled Groom’s awareness of the

¹⁹ Laura Cumming, ‘It’s time you made that bed, Tracey’, *Observer*, 10 Aug 2008, was critical, while Lynne Walker, ‘Tracey Emin’s work crude and self-centred? That’s missing the point’, *Independent*, 4 Aug 2008, found much to praise.

²⁰ Claire Black, ‘Emin Exposed’, *Scotsman*, 16 September 2008.

²¹ *The Guardian*, G2, 13 August 2008: ‘Having stirred things up with their Tracy Emin retrospective, Scotland’s national galleries of modern art are preparing for radical changes. Simon Groom, the galleries’ dapper new director, is keen to play around with the collection. So the Dean Gallery, neighbour to the main Gallery of Modern Art, is to undergo an experimental rehang this autumn to become Scotland’s main centre for art covering the period 1900-1945.’

persistent difficulty with establishing clear identities for the two adjacent buildings, which still lacked visual and programming unity, and the institution continued to debate how better to delineate the two sites. Earlier in the year, Leighton had commented on the shortcomings of the buildings housing the modern collections:

We have these wonderful buildings, the Dean and the GMA, but they also have their limitations. They're actually quite small and intimate, so you have things like a Jannis Kounellis installation that we physically couldn't show here... You say iconic building, but what about an iconic campus? I would dearly love, at some stage, to link the two sites together so there's one campus, as opposed to two sites split by a very busy and hair-raising road.²²

This suggestion picks up on the original discussions about using the Dean for the Scottish Gallery. The immediate response then had identified the need to unite the sites, either with a structure passing over the road, or an underground link. Without any direct link, the two sites have never united to form a single campus: a major architectural intervention, such as for example I.M. Pei's Pyramid at the Louvre, could radically transform how the two buildings function together. It is difficult, however, in the current financial climate to see how any such scheme will be justified, and therefore the problem will persist, hindering the institution's ability to present itself as a dynamic and evolving space.

August 2008, however, saw a different problem arise for the NGS, one that once again diverted attention and funds away from the GMA. The Duke of Sutherland let it be known that he wished to sell the works he had placed on long-term loan with the NGS since 1945, and which had become so central to the institution's identity. Immediately all resources had to be focused on the campaign to save two works by Titian: £50m had to be found within the next four months to secure *Diana and Actaeon* (NG 2839), and another £50m within the next four years for the second, *Diana and Callisto* (NGL 059.46), which would also secure a further twenty-one years of long-term loan of the other works in the Bridgewater Collection. This collection, comprising such works as Poussin's *Seven Sacraments* (NGL 067.46A-G) series and the *Bridgewater Madonna* by Raphael (NGL 065.46), has provided the Scottish National Gallery with some of its finest works for over fifty years, and their continuing presence was seen as essential. The price, however, was so far out of the

²² 'The man who wants to give Scotland its own Guggenheim', *Sunday Herald*, 2 March 2008. The most recent re-branding exercise (June 2011) has eliminated the name 'Dean', and the Belford Road campus is now referred to as Modern One and Modern Two, with the Dean being renamed 'Modern Two'.

limits of the NGS that once again it entered into a joint acquisition, this time with the National Gallery in London, who had access to far greater sources of income and fund-raising opportunities. The campaign was eventually successful thanks to British and Scottish government support together with contributions from the Art Fund and private donations, but this meant a dramatic reduction in purchase grants for the other departments in the NGS, including the GMA.

The exhibition programme, however, was unaffected by the drama of the Titian campaign, and continued to present a wide-ranging vision of modern and contemporary art. The exhibition that followed Emin at the GMA gave the Scottish public the opportunity to see works by a Scottish artist who was attracting international attention. Charles Avery had been one of six artists chosen to represent Scotland at the country's first official participation in the Venice Biennale in 2007, an event curated by another of the SNGMA's senior curators, Phil Long. Once again the Avery exhibition demonstrated the flexibility of the gallery space: for this exhibition it had to perform multiple roles in providing the backdrop to the intricate fictional world of *The Island*, a mythical place created by Avery and documented in different ways.²³ It was an extraordinarily varied exhibition, with meticulously detailed drawings, maps and texts accompanied by free-standing display cases more reminiscent of a natural history museum.

In tandem with the Avery exhibition at Belford Road, the second major exhibition to be sponsored under the Bank of Scotland's totalART programme at the RSA was a retrospective of the contemporary artist, Gerhard Richter. This provided the third essential type of exhibition for the Gallery to offer its public: a major retrospective of one of the greatest figures of post-war European art. It demonstrated again the suitability of the RSA building for contemporary art, with another successful installation overseen by Hartley. The *Telegraph* review stated: 'This beautifully presented exhibition makes for a deeply impressive and profound experience'.²⁴ Like the Avery, the overwhelming feature of the exhibition was the variety of the art, ranging from almost industrially produced, minimalist colour charts, to personal photographs re-worked to create strangely atmospheric paintings, to the old masterly

²³ The press release described it: 'Using texts, drawings, installations and sculpture Avery has detailed the landscape, customs, and culture of his island, creating a challenging space for philosophical inquiry.' NGS press release, accessed online, <http://www.nationalgalleries.org/aboutus/press/1:172/>.

²⁴ Mark Brown, 'Breathtaking master of all styles', *Telegraph*, 18 November 2008.

illusionistic 'Candle'.

The Dean Gallery, which Simon Groom had hinted might be given over to art pre-1945, was instead given a more patriotic hang, with an exhibition of works from the permanent collection entitled **Four Scottish Painters**, featuring the work of Wilhemina Barnes-Graham, John Bellany, Alan Davie and Anne Redpath. Over a six-month period, therefore, the Scottish public could see Emin, Avery, Richter, as well as these four Scottish painters: the GMA was fulfilling its responsibility as a national institution by providing the public with a varied programme of stimulating art, catering for a variety of tastes.

Launch of Artist Rooms

In the serious climate surrounding the negotiations to secure the Sutherland collection coupled with the general financial crisis, the positive news generated by the inauguration of the Artist Rooms scheme was particularly welcome. The first major display was launched in Edinburgh in March 2009. A series of works by Damien Hirst formed the central focus of the show, consisting of sufficient material to constitute a mini-retrospective of the notorious yBa artist, who, like Emin, had yet to be given such a show in a national institution. This was seen as a deliberate choice, to launch the scheme with a star attraction: 'To open with Hirst is symbolic for the project, connecting it with the latest, sexiest living artist...'²⁵ It also showed works by a selection of other less publicised artists, including Vija Celmins, Alex Katz and Francesca Woodman, demonstrating the breadth of artistic practice in the latter part of the 20th century and revealing the depth of the Artist Rooms collection.

The *Financial Times* review saw great merit in the series of displays: 'Artist Rooms here more than fulfils its aim: by examining significant artists in depth, it dramatises too the threads and loops of the past thirty years of art-making, and shows that art history is not the sum of themes and schools but of individual imaginations'.²⁶ This positive response to the format offers some vindication of one of the frequently voiced criticisms of the scheme; that in restricting the displays to single artists in each room, it prevents the kind of comparative analysis that has underpinned much art-

²⁵ *The Financial Times, Weekend Supplement*, 21 March 2009.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

historical study. This reviewer saw scope for understanding better the broad sweep of artistic developments through the more detailed analysis of the individual artists that this arrangement allows. It must be recognised, however, that the restriction to show works only as single-artist rooms is severely limiting, and raises questions about the ownership of the works. If the works are owned by the Galleries, how long can the restrictions imposed by d'Offay persist, and what purpose do they serve? It seems like the extreme consequence of the tendency of owners not to lend to group or thematic exhibitions. It is curious to notice that on the NGS website section covering the works in the Artist Rooms collection, various thematic associations have been made, which illustrate how well the works lend themselves to multiple interpretations.

Once again, the setting provided by the SNGMA was seen as enhancing the viewer's understanding of the works: 'the sparsely arranged rooms at the bright, airy neo-classical Modern Art Gallery invite calm, sober engagement with Hirst's work in the light not of spiralling prices but of history'.²⁷ Whilst this remark is intended as a compliment, it might suggest that the institutional frame of the Edinburgh gallery exerts too powerful an influence on how the viewer experiences the art, perhaps even subduing or detracting from the original meaning. The suburban setting is not always the most appropriate background for contemporary art.

Laura Cumming, the critic who had expressed serious reservations about the scheme, was nevertheless complimentary about the Edinburgh show: 'The first tranche of the d'Offay Donation has been chosen with real tact and intelligence. Cool, elegant and beautifully presented...'²⁸ Her main concern lay with the uneven quality of the works in the collection, referring to this first exhibition drawn from it as 'a curate's egg, expertly handled by the SNGMA'. Along with comments about the elegance of the setting, remarks about the quality of the curating of all exhibitions at the SNGMA have become standard. Once again, this confirms Hall's belief that the quality of an exhibition lies in the skill of the expositor, as much as in the quality of the works, and justifies Calvocoressi's policy to encourage the development of junior members of staff. It is important to acknowledge the central role played by the curators in defining the institution and maintaining its reputation at a time when their number has been

²⁷ *The Financial Times, Weekend Supplement*, 21 March 2009.

²⁸ Laura Cumming, 'Give them some personal space', *Observer, Review*, 15 March 2009.

reduced and other departments, such as Development and Marketing, have increased. However vital the role carried out by these departments, the work of the curators is what creates the institution.

Despite her reservations, Cumming concludes her review with a positive assessment of the scheme's potential:

Edinburgh already has some very creative plans for circulating works, sowing art to reap more of it, and not necessarily by the usual names. So whatever you may think of the art coming your way soon, consider what it may bring in its wake. Quite apart from anything else, this is an unceasing gift to the nation.²⁹

The scheme has indeed begun to reap more art from the project: as noted, the exhibition of Robert Therrien's works in Artist Rooms prompted the artist to donate another piece to the collection, **Stacked Plates**. It is hoped that there will be further generosity on the part of artists, eager to participate in a venture that has such solid institutional backup.

The phrase used by Leighton to refer to the Artist Rooms programme when the acquisition was still under negotiation was a 'Gallery without walls'. The phrase originates as the translation of an essay by Malraux, *'Le Musée Imaginaire'*, but in the sense used here, it conveys the idea of the Gallery extending its reach beyond the confines of its own buildings. The strategy has since become central to the organisation as a whole, and is a key priority in the Missions and Objectives listed on the website: 'The concept of a **Gallery without walls** is crucial to our approach, embracing the notion of a collection which is accessible both in the traditional art gallery context and through other means both physical and virtual.'³⁰ It fits with more general trends within museums to extend access to their collections beyond their physical frame: the American Museums Association suggests that the museum should become a place 'from which' services flow, rather than a place 'to which' people go.³¹ The combination of a major expansion of the collection and the lack of any extension has forced the NGS to consider innovative strategies to balance the museum's traditional role as custodian of works of art with the demand for greater public access. The Artist Rooms scheme blurs the conventional distinction between permanent collection and temporary exhibition. The works belong jointly to the Tate

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ <http://www.nationalgalleries.org/aboutus/page/1:176/> (accessed 18 May 2011)

³¹ <http://futureofmuseums.blogspot.com/2009/10/tomorrows-news-today-museums-without.html> (accessed 18 May 2011).

and NGS, but they are intended, rather paradoxically, to be on permanent display in temporary exhibitions throughout the UK. It could well prove to be a model for a new understanding of the function of a museum, extending its role well beyond that of custodian first and foremost. As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill suggests:

If present-day museums and galleries can be seen as not the only form in which museums can exist, but merely the form which the play of various powers has permitted to emerge, then shifts in this play of powers can be seen as part of an unceasing, jostling process to gain the high ground.³²

In this context, perhaps Artist Rooms can prove that a new form is emerging.

What you see is where you're at

The approach of the fiftieth anniversary concentrated minds at the GMA. The landmark date called for a commemoration, but at a time of severe economic cutbacks, there was no budget for a lavish exhibition. The obvious answer was to use the resources in the permanent collection. This has become a widely discussed trend in all museums over the last few years, with permanent collections being 'mined' to provide interesting new combinations of works that can be presented as fresh displays, and complies with the trend towards 'effective collecting', intended to ensure that works in a permanent collection do not remain out of sight in stores.³³

The proposition formed a neat counterpoint to the opening ceremony 50 years earlier, when the comments about the lack of works in the collection were scathing, and when reviewers had expressed scepticism about the institution's ability to address the task ahead. It marked a distinct coming-of-age for the institution, proving that it had the resources now to provide multiple exhibitions for its public.

The exhibition series generated much anticipation: 'Gallery watchers will be keeping an eye on proceedings because although Groom is emphatic that the rehang is a group effort, from a team that includes some very experienced curators, it may provide one of the clearest indications of the new director's own direction.'³⁴ It is difficult to

³² E. Hooper-Greenhill (1992), p. 8.

³³ 'Making Collections Effective', Report by Museums Association 2007, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=14112> [accessed 28 February 2011]

³⁴ Moira Jeffrey, 'Fifty Years New', *Scotland on Sunday*, 22 November 2009.

ascertain whether the new definition of the role has made it more difficult for Groom to make a visible difference to the institution. After being in post for two years, one might already have expected to detect signs of a new direction for the Gallery, but the changed relationship with the broader organisation that the change of role brought about may have made it less possible to effect change within a single component of that broader organisation. Groom recognised the strength of his team of experienced curators; their in-depth knowledge of the collection was invaluable in preparing suitable themes for the anniversary displays. In reply to the journalist's question about direction for the institution, Groom explained what he intended to communicate through the rehangs:

It's signalling the fact that the Gallery engages with the contemporary and it has to be able to talk to artists as well as the public now. Fifty sounds middle-aged and not with it, and of course the whole point of the history of contemporary art is that it is about now, but that artists haven't come from nowhere, they are always looking back. Really the whole rehang is about seeing the collection through new eyes.

As a way to celebrate the 50th anniversary, the extensive use of the permanent collection to produce an ongoing series of temporary exhibitions represents the ultimate accolade to the hard work that had gone into the building up of that collection. In direct contrast to the early days at Inverleith House, when only temporary loans could fill the walls, or to the move to Belford Road when it was felt that the permanent collection would not by itself arouse enough interest, now the Gallery's own resources could supply an ongoing programme of changing displays, each with a fully developed intellectual foundation to sustain it. The programme became an exercise in exploring the variety of ways of presenting the works; it can be viewed as a Foucauldian analysis of the potential narratives and juxtapositions inherent in the collection.³⁵

³⁵ See McClellan (2008), p. 110.



Figure 31: Martin Boyce, *Electric Trees and Telephone Booth Conversations*

The first display in the eighteen-month exhibition programme, entitled **What you see is where you're at**, featured a new acquisition by the Scottish artist, Martin Boyce, entitled *Electric Trees and Telephone Booth Conversations* (GMA 5022) of 2006.³⁶ This installation work was placed in the main gallery facing the visitor on entry, immediately creating a spectacular impact that confounded the regular visitor's standard experience of that space. The online description of the work suggests that it 'transforms the gallery environment into a sinister playground on a dark night.'³⁷ Such a transformation helped to generate a sense of novelty that extended to all the exhibits. The displays all shared a dynamic quality; works were shown in new contexts, with many older works that had not been on display for some time making a fresh impact. The works by César (*Compression*, GMA 2505) and Arman (*Cello in Space*, GMA 2793), for instance, which had been quite controversial when acquired, retained all their vitality when shown in a room entitled 'Things', which also showed a piece by Boyle family, *Addison Crescent Study (London Series)* (GMA 1302), Marcel Broodthaers' *A Visual Tower* (GMA 2794) and a work by Louise Nevelson, *Nightscape* (GMA 2194).

³⁶ The title of the exhibition series was taken from a video work by Luke Fowler of the same name, which appeared in Part 3 of the 18-month programme.

³⁷ http://www.nationalgalleries.org/collection/online_az/4:322/result/0/99810?initial=B&artistId=15479&artistName=Martin%20Boyce&submit=116413 [accessed 28 February 2011]

The impact achieved by the Boyce installation has been replicated with some of the other large-scale items in the d'Offay collection, such as the Ian Hamilton Finlay work, *Sailing Dinghy*, and the Robert Therrien installation, *No Title (Table and Four Chairs)*. These works added vibrancy, being immediately visible on entry, and helped maintain a high level of public interest. Using large installations recalls the commissions for the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern. The criticism is often levelled at Modern Art Museums that they have succumbed to a popular tendency to 'spectacularise' art, and that massive installation pieces such as those commissioned for the Turbine Hall can trivialise the experience of visiting an art gallery, but they undoubtedly help to arouse people's interest, particularly when situated directly on entering the Gallery.³⁸

The other displays that have been mounted in the smaller rooms have been less spectacular in their immediate impact, but have nevertheless offered fascinating insights into the concepts underlying display. Of particular interest to this study were the rooms curated by the two previous Directors, Douglas Hall and Richard Calvocoressi. Both of these had to be constructed from works not already earmarked for display elsewhere, so they did not have the full range of the collection at their disposal, but what each put together proved immensely telling. Hall expressed rather eloquently the positive aspect of not having the best works available:

Many of our key acquisitions, like our first Cubist, our first Fauve etc. are hung elsewhere in the gallery. So are several other works that are particularly dear to me, for themselves or for the circumstances of their acquisition. Except the two paintings by Leger, all the works here could reasonably be called members of the second eleven. That is not a bad thing. When faced with the greatest names of 20th century art, we tend to see them as historical objects. In this room we can look at artists who are only a little less than great, enjoy them and consider what they are about.³⁹

This remark deserves scrutiny, suggesting that it is difficult to view the best-known artists without seeing their works as primarily cultural commodities, and consequently it is harder to judge their artistic merit. When we look at a Picasso, for example, it is difficult to see beyond the label, 'Picasso', as a commodity. It would seem to contradict what David Baxandall had insisted upon when the collection was being initiated, the compelling need to have the works of the great names, rather than

³⁸ For a discussion on the Turbine Hall installations, see Wouter Davidts, 'The Vast and the Void', *Footprint*, 2007, pp. 77-92, and Miranda Sawyer, 'How we all learned to stop sneering and embrace modern art', *The Observer*, 11 October 2009.

³⁹ Wall label from exhibition '*What you see is where you're at*', Room 8.

those of slightly lesser fame. Baxandall had argued that only the great names could convey the true essence of the art of the twentieth century. To have a room showing these ‘second eleven’, and realise how powerful they were, particularly how well they were displayed in conjunction with each other, was a demonstration of Hall’s earlier observation, that the most important contribution was the skill of the expositor, more than the ‘masterpiece’ status of the works. It also resonates with Hilde Hein’s assertion that all works have value, and even inferior works allow us to sharpen our sensibilities.⁴⁰ The labels Hall provided for the individual works contained very personal, idiosyncratic information that added to the enjoyment of the works (illustrating the potential for labels to range more widely than is generally the case). It is intriguing to ponder the notion of works being particularly dear to Hall ‘for the circumstances of their acquisition’. The phrase captures the variety that lay behind many of the early purchases and bequests: the successes at spotting a work that would provide good value, the deserved acclaim for acting decisively on seeing an opportunity, the treasure-hunt aspect of always looking out for possible additions.⁴¹ His final remark indicated how completely he believed in the skill of the curator; even though the great acquisitions of his career were not included in the display, he was happy to be associated with these less prestigious works because he had always valued works on their individual merit, for what they could convey to the visitor if well hung: *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice*.⁴²

Hall’s display was then replaced with one chosen by Calvocoressi. In stark contrast to Hall, he elected to show only three large pieces of German sculpture that he had purchased – the second-most significant area where he had expanded the collection after Surrealism, all of which was on display in a major exhibition at the Dean. The three pieces were *The Terrible Year 1937* (GMA 3036), by Ernst Barlach, a piece that held particular significance for Calvocoressi as it was his first acquisition as Director; *Untitled (Figure with Raised Arm)* (GMA 3530) by Georg Baselitz, 1982-1984; and Stephan Balkenhol’s *Large Man* (GMA 4254) of 1988. The selection was emblematic of Calvocoressi’s contribution to the development of the institution. It was under his direction that the decision was taken to specialise in those fields where it was possible to develop depth rather than continue seeking ‘universal’ coverage. The contrast with

⁴⁰ See Chap. 2, note 24.

⁴¹ In a public talk held with the three Directors of the SNGMA for the fiftieth anniversary, Hall described with particular relish his purchase of the Otto Dix work, **Nude Girl on a Fur**, which he noticed in a gallery in Kassel while there attending *Documenta*.

⁴² Wall label for Room 8, SNGMA, echoing Sir Christopher Wren’s epitaph in St Paul’s Cathedral.

Hall's more dense hang was indicative of how the institution progressed under each of them. Under Hall, it was imperative that the newly formed institution should acquire enough works to provide an overview of the evolution of art over the twentieth century; under Calvocoressi, it became more important to find areas of specialisation, and to build on the strengths that were already in the collection.

Another series of rooms showed selections of works from the permanent collection that were chosen by artists to give an indication of what had been influential on their development. The first of these was by Callum Innes, who chose several works that showed his clear preference for Minimalist works, providing a telling insight into the inspiration behind his style of painting. In contrast, Elizabeth Blackadder produced a much denser and varied display, selecting some works that she had come to know from seeing in the collection and that had inspired her, and some works from her teachers at Edinburgh College of Art as an acknowledgement of their role in forming her artistic practice. These selections, as well as the ones by the former Directors, gave an unusually strong voice to the display curator, making the choice of works more understandable to the visitor compared to the more pedagogical approach used by the museum's professional curators:

An exhibition that is signed, uses the first person in the label copy, and/or reveals the personality of the artist is a personal, creative act analogous to a signed work of art, and intentionally becomes an autobiographical exhibition... Unsigned exhibitions reinforce the notion that there is a godlike voice of authority behind the selection of objects. But presenting a curator as an individual usefully demonstrates that exhibitions are in reality signed columns rather than news releases and that each producer, like each columnist, has a point of view.⁴³

The series of different displays allowed for both approaches, creating a dynamic programme that was both informative and personalised. The visitor was given a selection of insights into the works in the collection, ranging from the personal, to the artistic, to the historical.

The overriding concept of the changing exhibition programme was variety. This is an accurate reflection of the institution's general ethos: it has never sought to represent a single voice, nor to impose a single view of twentieth century art. This quality can be seen as both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness. It is a strength insofar as it

⁴³ Elaine Heumann Gurian, 'Noodling Around', in Ivan Karp and Stephen D. Lavine (eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Displays*, (Washington; London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), p.187.

has allowed the institution to maintain its various functions of collecting both historic modern and contemporary works, international artists and Scottish. It is a weakness in that the institution has failed to construct a coherent programme from the works in its collection. The **What you see is where you're at** displays were all small-scaled, proposing no sweeping narrative of the century's art, but looking at individual movements such as 'Constructivism', 'Scottish Modernism' or 'Classic Modernism in Paris', or at specific qualities such as 'Paint' or 'White'. The overall impression was therefore somewhat piecemeal, but this too accurately reflected the works in the collection. By recognising the limitations of the works it owned, it did not overreach in its ambitions. Each small display was well-formed and intelligently presented, offering the visitor several easily digested insights into modern art rather than a comprehensive overview. The quality of the displays testifies to the expertise of the team of curators who all contributed to the programme, forming coherent plans for each display according to their individual strengths.⁴⁴

The extended programme of displays is an example of what the Museums Association set out to promote in its 2005 document entitled 'Collections for the Future', the aim of which was to encourage debate about the role of collections in the 21st century museum, and to explore ways of using permanent collections more effectively through the use of loans and collaborations, as well as exhibitions.⁴⁵ The **What you see is where you're at** displays brought many works out of storage that had not been seen for a long time, giving them a renewed role within the many narratives that the institution could now express.

Forming exhibitions from the resources offered by the permanent collection has one significant drawback: the loss of ticket income. It has always been the accepted practice at the NGS that the permanent collection should be freely available to view, and charges are made only for exhibitions that require loans of works from elsewhere. This is based on the principle that works are purchased with public funds and must therefore be seen free of charge. The programme of changing displays has been very effective at encouraging more frequent visits; attendances have increased considerably over the course of the 18-month programme. From this perspective, the

⁴⁴ The staff who were responsible for the changing displays were: Keith Hartley, Patrick Elliott, Phil Long, Alice Strang, Lauren Rigby and Julie Ann Delaney. In the Dean Gallery, the Keiller library displays were curated by Ann Simpson, Kirsty Meehan and Kerry Watson.

⁴⁵ 'Collections for the Future', <http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=11121>

exercise has been very successful at engaging the public's sustained attention. Unfortunately the lack of ticket income meant that there was no additional funding made available for marketing, so the numbers might have been even higher. The increase has been most welcome, as visitor numbers had been severely cut by the loss of the gallery bus.⁴⁶ The difficulties of the location continue to present problems for the institution, but the interest aroused by the changing programmes has contributed to greater attendances. If the trend towards using the permanent collection as the basis for temporary exhibitions continues, it may be necessary to introduce charges for these exhibitions, given the expense of the art handling team and the research time of the curators.

The idea of the ever-changing displays at the GMA chimes with the shifting attitude of the public towards museums and art. Whereas in the past a visit to a gallery would have been considered a combination of a spiritually enriching and an essentially educational experience, now most visitors look on a visit to an art gallery as primarily entertainment, often asking 'What's on?' before deciding to spend precious leisure time coming to it.⁴⁷ The decision to visit will depend on the prospect of seeing something new, not principally on re-visiting familiar works.

⁴⁶ For several years the NGS had provided a free shuttle bus service connecting the three sites, but the costs proved prohibitive and the service was suspended.

⁴⁷ The eponymous title of the Galleries' own programme of events reiterates this attitude.



Figure 32: Anthony Gormley, *6 Times Right* from *6 Times*

During the 50th anniversary year, two new commissions were unveiled by the SNGMA. The contracts for both of these had been prepared several years previously but had required considerable administrative work to bring to completion. The first was the work originally commissioned with the *Landform* prize money from the 2004 Gulbenkian award. Calvocoressi had initiated discussions with the sculptor Anthony Gormley, who had been keen to create a work that extended beyond the confines of the Gallery into the community. The project evolved into *6 Times*, a multiple work comprising six life-size statues cast from Gormley's own body. The first of these is buried up to the chest in the pavement on Belford Road at the entrance to the SNGMA, while the others are placed on plinths in the water at intervals along the Water of Leith, starting directly behind the Gallery and ending at the mouth of the river, with the final figure looking outwards across the Forth. The sculptor wanted the figures to be discovered by chance by people walking along the Water of Leith walkway. They signal a new relationship between the works possessed by the museum and the public who are the intended audience: instead of being locked inside the safe custodianship of the Gallery building, the works are placed directly in the community, making them truly accessible to the public. What makes this work so potent is the way that it connects the institutional container with the wider community. To be experienced in full, the work requires the viewer to follow the journey from outside the boundary wall of the Gallery, along the river to the open

sea: as a metaphor for the power of art to open up new horizons, it thus places the institution at the start of an enriching journey towards a wider world.



Figure 33: Richard Wright, *The Stairwell Project*

The other work to be unveiled in 2010 marks a different response to the institution. Instead of moving out from the Gallery, the fresco by Richard Wright, rather prosaically entitled *Stairwell Project*, actually uses the walls of the Dean Gallery as the background for his exquisitely beautiful and haunting mural composed of an abstract flower-like motif. The tiny detail is repeated in sweeping curves around the lightwell and over the ceiling, creating a swarm-like effect. Like the Gormley figures, however, Wright too wants the visitor to notice the work as if by chance – its presence is discrete, not strident, despite covering such a large area. It is a work that powerfully reconnects art, architecture and the museum. The idea of commissioning a work from Wright dated back to the opening of the Dean Gallery. As Hartley explains in the video-clip on the Gallery website, after displaying one of Wright's pieces in 1997, which was only in place for the duration of the exhibition, the ambition grew of commissioning a permanent work for the new Gallery and placing it in a public area.⁴⁸ The coincidence of the two commissions being completed at the same time

⁴⁸ http://www.nationalgalleries.org/collection/in_focus/4:19402/19369/19543.

makes one reflect on the different ways that the institution is addressing important questions about its position within the community. The Gormley sculptures demonstrate a willingness to cede some of the protective ownership of its objects, while the Wright shows that the fundamental function of the museum, the display of the authentic object, is still an essential and defining aspect of the institution.

In addition to these two commissions that had been in the pipeline for several years, two outdoor works were brought into the Belford Road grounds for the anniversary celebrations. An installation by Scottish artist, Nathan Coley, was positioned on the lawn outside the Dean Gallery: the work consists of billboard scaffolding with an illuminated text declaring 'There will be no miracles here.' This enigmatic statement encourages the viewer to construct a meaning from the unlikely positioning of the rough, commercial-looking scaffolding on the lawn in front of the elegant Dean building, and from the ambiguous text: is it a simple observation, or is it an order, or is it a prediction? Does 'here' refer to the outdoor space on which it is mounted, or to the whole institution, or to the wider city context? As it is situated at the moment, one can see directly behind it the Bourdelle statue, *The Virgin of Alsace*, one of the first acquisitions of modern art by the NGS, purchased in 1930. The juxtaposition adds another layer of meaning to both works, proving the enduring ability of the museum to suggest fresh interpretations of art.

Across the road at the GMA, another enigmatic text greets visitors. The neon installation work by Martin Creed inserted along the frieze of the portico at the GMA since the launch of the **What you see is where you're at** series announces that 'Everything is going to be alright'. The message suggested by this work offers several points for reflection at the end of this history of the institution, and summarises certain persistent themes. It appears to express optimism; no matter what happens, everything will work out well. As a comment on the state of the institution, this can be read as a statement of confidence guaranteeing future progress. If, on the other hand, one interprets the statement as an example of modern art's predilection for irony, the optimism can appear misguided, and the message interpreted as warning how illusory such confidence would be. The ambiguous message also resonates with the attitude suggested by museum theory: 'Theorists call for the transformation of the museum from a site of worship and awe to one of discourse and

critical reflection...'⁴⁹ A message declaring 'Everything is going to be alright' is one way to open the museum to discourse and critical reflection. Marstine suggests that this trend helps to define the postmodern museum: 'The postmodern museum is sometimes more self-reflexive. Frames are challenged, fragmented, and made transparent as the museum declares itself an active player in the making of meaning'.⁵⁰ The neon light across the portico of the SNGMA represents a challenge to the institutional frame of the Greek Revival temple-form that has often impeded full engagement with the contemporary, and reinforced the public perception of the institution as staid and conservative.⁵¹



Figure 34: Martin Creed, Work No. 975 *Everything is going to be alright*

The work can therefore be seen as representing two traditions, without declaring whether these two are complementary or conflicting. It forms a transition between the modernist belief in the positive value of art as a force for progress and the postmodern belief in ambiguity and shifting meaning, and distrust of clear, univocal

⁴⁹ Marstine, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ This is not the first use of an artistic intervention on the portico. When the SNGMA opened here, the artist Sam Ainslie was commissioned to create banners to draw attention to the new function of the building. See Fiona Mclean, *Marketing the Museum*, (London: Routledge, 1996): '... signs and banners on a building can convey messages about the museum.... The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art uses banners across its rather imposing frontage to soften the building, and to clearly denote the building as a modern art gallery.' p. 152.

statements. It might represent a succinct summary of the multiple functions the institution continues to fulfil.

The work has been the source of much consternation on the part of the local public. The choice of spelling has provoked irritation from linguistic traditionalists who insist that the correct English spelling requires ‘all right’. It prompted one former pupil of John Watson’s to send an angry email complaining that the ‘mis-spelling’ was an insult to the work carried out in the building by a beloved English teacher who had instilled in her pupils respect for traditional orthographic accuracy.⁵² Such public response can be taken as a measure of the work’s success at drawing attention to the building, and causing people to think about what it is they expect from the institution. In doing this, the work acts as a metaphor for the institution and how it faces its future – willing to provoke criticism from traditionalists, acknowledging the optimism of the earlier 20th century’s artistic vision whilst offering an ironic comment on today’s less certain world. To complete the analogy with the institutional programme, the work is by a Scottish artist, demonstrating an ongoing commitment to the fulfilment of its national responsibility.

The neon text is situated on the imposing temple façade of the building that has already been noted as acting as a barrier, forming an unwelcoming threshold for those not used to visiting museums.⁵³ The temple-front has always reinforced the idea of the museum as a sacred space, whereas the bright neon sign, with its connotations of the modernity and glamour of ‘downtown’ sites of entertainment or commerce, undermines the sacred quality of the unadorned portico, making the negative impact of the architecture less intimidating.⁵⁴ The Gallery has always wanted to break down the formality of the approach: the austerity of the setting was not of their choosing, but simply the consequence of finding an affordable site with more space. The *Landform* project was intended to transform the area in front of the building and make that space more distinct. This relatively small intervention into the fabric of the

⁵² Email entitled ‘Mis-spelling of “Alright” in the neon sign above the main entrance, in lieu of the correct, orthodox spelling – “All right”.’ Sent 9 July 2010.

⁵³ The term ‘threshold fear’ is the title of a chapter by Elaine Heumann Gurian in Suzanne MacLeod, *Re-shaping Museum Space*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 203-214.

⁵⁴ ‘The paradigm of museum as shrine depends on the institution’s declaration of authority. Visitors believe they have a transformative experience because the director/curator is a connoisseur. The expertise of the “museum man” (the expert is always a patriarchal figure) gives an assurance that museum objects are “authentic” masterpieces that express universal truths in an established canon or standard of excellence.’ Marstine, p. 9.

building, however, is perhaps the most successful to date, acting as an encouraging beacon welcoming and reassuring prospective visitors.

The neon acts as a sign of the Gallery's attempt 'to inhabit a more democratic, open-ended 'third space', beyond elitism and consumerism'.⁵⁵ It provides an appropriate endnote to the history of the institution.

⁵⁵ Nick Prior, 'Having One's Tate and Eating It ', in A. McClellan (ed.), 2003, p. 68.

CONCLUSION

A visitor unfamiliar with the institution who came to the SNGMA during its fiftieth anniversary year would have encountered a sizeable campus, situated on the outer edge of Edinburgh's city centre. The visitor could explore the extensive grounds surrounding the two adjacent sites of the former John Watson's school and the former Dean orphanage. The architecture of the main buildings and all the smaller gatehouses and lodges within the grounds would have provided no indication of the modern content, but several additions, varying from permanent interventions such as Charles Jencks' Landform to temporary installations such as Martin Creed's neon along the pediment, or Nathan Coley's billboard illumination on the lawn of the Dean, as well as the publicity banners and institutional signage would have identified the artistic nature of the campus as the site of a museum of modern art. The works on display both inside and out would have given the visitor a taste of many aspects of Scottish and international art of the last century, and some brief glimpses of contemporary practice. To what extent does this recent snapshot of the SNGMA represent the successful completion of the mission to establish a Gallery of Modern Art for Scotland initiated at the start of the twentieth century?

The institutional narrative that has emerged from this survey of the history of the SNGMA indicates that it has remained faithful to the multiple responsibilities implied by its title, to bring modern art to Scotland, and to collect and display international and national art from the start of the twentieth century up to the present day. Many different functions are included in this remit; as well as 'simply' displaying art, the gallery also selects and interprets and explains. Having accepted such a diverse range of activities on limited financial support, it has been forced to formulate a hierarchy of priorities. In doing so, it has had to confront many tensions, paradoxes and compromises, and it is these that have determined how the gallery has evolved. Duncan Macmillan argues that the multiple roles undertaken have prevented the SNGMA from fulfilling its ambitions: 'The institution that was eventually created ... has been inhibited by the split between its two very different functions – one as a historical museum of twentieth century art, and the other as a centre for contemporary

art.’¹ Undoubtedly balancing these two roles has been difficult, but the study has shown that the split is even more complex, including in particular the need also to address the question of representing national art.

The addition of the word ‘Scottish’ to the title of the institution just after it opened indicated that the national dimension required further explicit qualification. The Trustees had originally accepted that ‘National’ would provide adequate identification of its role and status, but by adding the qualifying label, ‘Scottish’, they altered its remit to highlight its specifically Scottish responsibilities. Initially this led to confusion, with many people expecting that the art shown there would be predominantly Scottish, whereas the intention was to act for the benefit of the Scottish people in offering the widest possible range of art for them to view. The dilemma is further complicated by the difficulty of determining what precisely is meant by the term ‘Scottish’ in relation to art produced during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: whether this should identify Scottish-born artists, Scottish trained artists, or Scottish resident artists. Andrew Graham Dixon’s comment, made with reference to **Scottish Art since 1900**, could also apply to the institution’s attitude to its identity; ‘an anxiety to be seen as distinctly Scottish with a nervous unwillingness to be seen as merely Scottish.’² This has been one of the central tensions observed through the course of the institution’s history: how to balance international art with Scottish art. Until the collection was sufficiently representative of the major trends of international art, prioritising Scottish art might have led to a reputation for parochialism. To avoid this charge, care was taken to ensure wide representation of both Scottish and international art: concern about maintaining the correct balance prevented the newly-formed SNGMA from accepting the SMAA collection in 1963, as it was then felt that the new gallery would have been constrained by such a predominantly Scottish collection. A greater proportion of funds was expended on international art because art prices necessarily determined this: this led to criticism that the institution was not championing its own national art. The complaint from the Saltire Society was the clearest example of this, but many art journalists over the fifty-year history have also accused the institution of lack of patriotism. As it celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, it is finally achieving the balance

¹ Duncan Macmillan, *Scottish Art in the 20th Century* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2001), p. 105.

² See page 153.

between Scottish and international art that was central to the original intentions of the SMAA at the start of the twentieth century.

The second major tension to be negotiated by the SNGMA is common to every institution dedicated to collecting modern art. There is a philosophical paradox in trying to combine the duty to conserve works in a permanent collection with the duty to acquire works by living artists who have not yet had their lasting relevance confirmed over time. The conundrum requires predicting the future by collecting works from the present, while also maintaining a collection of works that are no longer contemporary. The twin responsibilities are not easily combined, as Macmillan's analysis suggests. As soon as an institution possesses works that it must safeguard in a collection, preservation of these works tends to become the dominant function. The study has shown that the SNGMA has faced up to this paradox in different ways at different moments. During its pre-history, when Cursiter was drawing up plans for an art centre, the emphasis was on having a small collection with the emphasis on contemporary works 'flowing through' in changing displays, and on combining collecting with producing, envisaging the gallery as a laboratory as well as a display space. His concept of works 'flowing through' resonates with Barr's famous description of the collection at MoMA representing 'a torpedo through time': both of these visions were essentially dynamic, not static. At the time of opening in 1960, however, it was seen as more important to establish a collection of works of international status tracing the evolution of modern art from Cubism onwards. Such a concept held an inherently static quality, which prioritised preservation over innovation. The later 1960s and 1970s saw intense self-scrutiny amongst museums showing modern art, with many seeking to shift the balance away from preservation as the central principle. Hall recognised the changes in the way many museums interacted with avant-garde art, but refused to sacrifice the historic for the contemporary. He proposed an innovative architectural solution that would have allowed for a combination of functions, but eventually had to settle for a compromise that at least offered more space, including outdoor space for sculpture. These choices laid the foundations for the institution as it is today, able to offer the public a range of art from the start of the twentieth century to the present, but still not overtly engaged with current artistic production.

Despite some internal dissent from the newly-appointed Keeper in 1961, the Director and the Board of Trustees insisted on acquiring works from the earlier part of the century, instigating the formation of a collection that aimed to cover as many aspects of the artistic developments of the twentieth century as possible. By selecting to prioritise this area, it soon gained a reputation for not engaging with the contemporary, and therefore not representing the 'modern' art of the day. This is a common problem for museums of modern art: the accusatory protest of American artists in 1940 asking, 'How Modern is the Museum of Modern Art?' reflected their perception of that institution's lack of engagement with contemporary art practices in New York.³ Scottish artists have been less vocal in their dissatisfaction with the SNGMA, but the institution has not maintained the commitment undertaken by Cursiter to create a lively centre for art production as well as art collecting. Cursiter expressed clearly his intention to create a gallery that was different to the rarefied 'temple of the arts' at the NG. At the time of opening, however, David Baxandall saw greater merit in repeating the formula established at the NG, albeit in miniature, seeing this as better suited to the restricted frame offered by Inverleith House. The precedent set then has never been entirely eroded; the new premises in the former John Watson's building provided more space, but not the variety of display options that could have accommodated such diverse requirements. Subsequent additional space at the Dean Gallery was another pragmatic compromise, accepted for the opportunity it offered of more display and study space, but once again, this was not sufficiently diversified to permit much concession to radical contemporary installations, or to allow space for art production.

The decision to adopt a non-confrontational approach in its efforts to educate the public to understand and appreciate modern art has reinforced the reputation for conservatism. The timing of the SNGMA's opening made the lack of engagement with contemporary trends evident: the first decade of its existence was one of immense social and cultural change, and several privately-operated avant-garde initiatives were set up in Edinburgh that were able to respond more vigorously to the changing artistic landscape, highlighting by contrast the SNGMA's lack of participation in current developments. The study has shown that the institution was well aware of its perceived conservatism, and although it did not relish this, it

³ A group of Abstract Expressionists gathered outside MoMA and distributed a leaflet entitled 'How Modern is the Museum of Modern Art?'. The protest was reported in *New York Times*: 'Artists Denounce Modern Museum', 17 April 1940.

accepted it as an inevitable consequence of the restricted space and budget available to it. During the 1960s and 1970s, so much of the energy of its limited personnel (for the first twelve years, the Keeper was the only member of staff assigned directly to the SNGMA) was diverted to the pressing need to resolve the problem of space. Following the move to larger premises in 1984, there has been an effort to engage more with the art of the present, both in exhibitions and in acquisitions. The task of convincing the general public of the merits of contemporary art remains challenging, but the SNGMA has consistently avoided antagonising too many of its perceived local public. It has chosen not to represent the more radical forms of avant-garde art, and has continued to cede that function to other organisations within Scotland. This too has led to severe criticism from those who would welcome greater engagement with the centres of artistic production, especially within Scotland. Richardson refers to a lack of cultural leadership at the SNGMA, which has resulted in the ‘innovative centre of Scottish art’ residing elsewhere.⁴ In this respect, the institution has still not fulfilled its original ambition, but it is important to recognise that the reasons for this are manifold, and do not simply represent a rejection of the role. It remains to be seen whether the recent re-definition of the Director’s role, stretching it beyond the narrow confines of a single component within the NGS, may offer the possibility of a return to the original spirit of the *Musée de Luxembourg*, and confer a shifting time frame on the SNGMA that would allow it greater engagement with the contemporary.

Looking at the broader international context, galleries of modern art flourished throughout the twentieth century. From the inauguration of MoMA in New York in 1929 to the unveiling of the Pompidou Centre in Paris in 1977, to the extension of the Tate at Bankside in London in 2000, modern art museums have generated much public attention, both for their architectural form and for the contents of their collections. The blueprint established at MoMA has been fundamental for all subsequent modern art galleries; the quality Douglas Hall most admired about it was ‘the way it has been able to extend its activities without losing the essential character of a museum as a centre of studies.’⁵ The Tate has been the institution most often used as a comparison with the SNGMA, with the early calls to establish a modern art gallery in Scotland referring to the need for a ‘Tate Gallery for Scotland’. Subsequent comparisons with the London gallery usually point out the unfair division of

⁴ Richardson, p. 7.

⁵ Report on Visit to Museums in Europe and the USA, p. 18. GMA A33/1/5/1/5/4.

resources, with the Tate benefiting from greater funding both for acquisitions and for building projects. The Pompidou Centre's premise of a mixed-use space represents an example of the dynamic combination of activities that has continued to elude the smaller Scottish institution, despite Cursiter's early proposals and Hall's suggestions for a diversified structure.

Apart from these major institutions that have generated so much publicity, however, there have also proliferated smaller galleries devoted to modern and contemporary art. Although the SNGMA has always measured itself against its much larger English counterpart, the Tate, in reality it belongs in the category of smaller institutions in terms of its physical size, the number of works in its collection, and the level of public funding it enjoys. A brief comparison with two similar-sized institutions established within a few years of the foundation of the SNGMA, the Louisiana Museum in Copenhagen and the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, illustrates how different structures of organisation and levels of bureaucracy can affect how a gallery evolves. The Louisiana Museum has been mentioned as a possible architectural model for the SNGMA, sharing a parkland setting and combining an older building with a modern extension. It opened only two years before the SNGMA, in 1958. Unlike the SNGMA, it was not a national institution, but a private museum, founded by an individual, Knud W. Jensen, to show his collection of Danish art of the twentieth century. His description of how the museum evolved reveals the difference between an organisation run by an individual compared to one dependent on government:

The 1958 wing had low ceilings and relatively modest dimensions according to my original intention of collecting mainly Danish easel paintings and human-size sculpture. In 1959, however, after I had my eyes opened to internationally successful contemporary art, I immediately changed the policy to include such art, not only at temporary exhibitions ... but also little by little in the acquisition policy.⁶

Jensen's ability to make decisions and change course immediately contrasts with the lengthy bureaucratic processes underpinning all decisions at the SNGMA. Several extensions were added to the original museum building over the following decades to house the expanding collection, and to allow for temporary exhibitions. This level of control also permitted Jensen to develop his institution into a wider cultural institution. A concert hall was added to the campus in 1976: 'Cultural events had

⁶ Lise Skjøth, 'Denmark's Louisiana Museum – age: thirty; status: work-in-progress', in *Museum International*, Vol. 41, no. 3, January/December 1989, pp. 160-164 (p. 160).

been arranged from the very start and these activities were now offered a professional setting making possible concerts of modern and classical music, theatrical performances, poetry readings panel discussions, meetings with artists, etc'.⁷

The Moderna Museet in Stockholm also opened in 1958, to show Swedish and international art from the beginning of the century to the present. Unlike the Louisiana, it is a state museum, and therefore the parallels with the Scottish example are stronger. The difference here was that the first Director, Pontus Hultén, chose to prioritise the engagement with contemporary art over the creation of the historic collection (although the museum has built up a considerable collection of works that cover the early years of the century as well as more recent art). David Elliott, appointed Director at the Moderna Museet in 1996, described the role played by Hultén: 'throughout the 1960s, ... he worked with living artists and purchased important works while they were still affordable.'⁸ This is an example of what might have been the situation at the SNGMA if the early recommendations made by Hall had been accepted. The contrast between the activities in Stockholm and Edinburgh has already been noted (see p. 68): it seems apparent that once these initial identities are formed, it becomes difficult for an institution to change. The Stockholm museum has maintained its close engagement with contemporary art, while the Edinburgh gallery has never escaped from its reputation for conservatism. Fiona Kearney wrote of the Moderna Museet in 2001: 'Moderna is conceived and developed as a dynamic space where work gets made as well as shown'.⁹ Both of these examples comprise echoes of Cursiter's vision for a vibrant, dynamic art centre that could combine production with preservation. The SNGMA has reached its first half-century without achieving this, but it remains an ambition. Given the expansion of the collection, and the innovative programme surrounding Artist Rooms, there is now a greater chance that the ambition might be realised. It could prove to be the area where Simon Groom makes his major contribution to the development of the institution.

The Louisiana and the Moderna Museet began in circumstances that were no more propitious than the SNGMA, but thanks to greater levels of financial support and less bureaucratic interference, they have been able to realize another ambition that the

⁷ Ibid., p. 161.

⁸ David Elliott, 'Sponge, Mirror and Knife', in *Moderna Museet – Modern Museum* (London: Scala Books, 1998), p. 8.

⁹ Fiona Kearney, 'Moderna Museet – Modern Museum', in *Circa*, no. 97, Autumn 2001, p. 44.

SNGMA still aspires to but has not yet been able to obtain – a striking modern building. From the analysis undertaken of the gallery's history, it is clear that the factor that has had the greatest impact on the SNGMA's development has been the compromise over the architectural settings that it has been obliged to accept over its fifty-year history. The buildings that have housed it, coupled with their location within the city, have hindered the institution from achieving the full range of its ambitions. On this point, the current study agrees with Richardson, that 'the main problem [is] its peripheral location in Edinburgh'.¹⁰ The move to the suburban location on Belford Road did not facilitate the attempt to break down the reputation for conservatism. 'The place where a gallery is sited partly determines its audience. Place thus implies both physical and political geography.'¹¹ The physical and political geography of the leafy Belford Road setting have reinforced the impression of an essentially establishment institution. The example of the Louisiana shows that a city-centre venue is not crucial, but the Edinburgh gallery's location is neither central nor out-of-town, and therefore has the advantages of neither. The original venue in Inverleith House was a compromise solution to allow the gallery to start functioning, but, as Richardson states: 'it was widely recognised as a holding position in the attempts to create Scotland's Museum of Modern Art, and its employment for such purposes can now be viewed as a polite deception, to both have and not have a Museum of Modern Art'.¹² The option of the former John Watson's building was welcomed by the institution in the late 1970s as a pragmatic solution to the problem of space, following two decades in Inverleith House when all hope of extending the gallery's influence was hindered by the diminutive scale of the premises. The space proved adequate in the short term at least, but the suburban location has added to the difficulty of establishing a modern identity for the institution, particularly given the imposing Classical details of the building. Michaela Giebelhausen argues that architectural style determines the character of a museum: '... the architecture *is* the museum: it is precisely the architectural configuration that gives the museum meaning. The architecture determines the viewing conditions both conceptually and physically. It not only frames the exhibits but also shapes our visitor experience'.¹³ If this assertion is applied to the SNGMA, it is evident that the architectural configuration does not lend itself to dynamic activity, but to calm contemplation.

¹⁰ Richardson, p. 189.

¹¹ Sandy Nairne, 'The Institutionalization of Dissent', in Greenberg *et al*, p. 399.

¹² Richardson, p. 35.

¹³ Michaela Giebelhausen, 'The Architecture *is* the Museum', in Marstine, p. 42.

There has always been a long-term aim to build an extension on the Belford Road campus, and a striking modern building could still radically transform the atmosphere of the site, but until that is achieved, the architectural frame continues to determine the institutional frame. In the meantime, interventions such as Charles Jencks' Landform and the Martin Creed neon lights across the pediment are the only externally visible attempts to undermine the conservative impression.

The portrait that has emerged from this detailed study is of an institution that has proved itself capable of responding well to difficult circumstances, although those difficult circumstances have at times greatly impeded its ability to function effectively in the rounded way that it has always aspired to do. The introductory quotation from the critic, Richard Dornet, has been shown to be largely true: the case of the SNGMA does present a good example of what can be achieved, even with restricted funds, if the people in charge of the institution perform well and are backed up by willing supporters. Nevertheless, the compliment does not disguise the unpropitious circumstances that have prevailed: in recognising 'what can be achieved on a restricted budget', Dornet acknowledges that the success has come about in spite of lack of funding. The acknowledgement underlines the inevitable compromises that have determined the evolution of the Gallery. The aims and ambitions of the SNGMA have not remained static, but have shifted to accommodate the opportunities that have arisen. Cursiter's vision for a vibrant institution that would have combined artistic production and display, and included other forms of artistic expression such as music and theatre, has not yet been realised, but remains part of the institution's aspiration.¹⁴ Under Baxandall it set out to achieve the standard 'universal survey' of twentieth century art history, prioritising the great artists of the accepted canon, but financial constraints prevented it from achieving this, and the collection gained in individuality as a result, with several less standard works being selected, following criteria set down by Hall. Richard Calvocoressi successfully promoted the option of focussing on certain specific areas of twentieth century art as a way of further distinguishing the collection. This approach has become an advantage, given that the survey method is now much discredited, as is the canon on which the survey was based: '... the canon is not a yardstick for determining enduring masterpieces, but [as] an agent of power, the power to decide whose culture

¹⁴ A recent internal memo referred to the need to create 'a buzz' at the Belford Road campus, recalling Cursiter's descriptions of a lively Art Centre.

and whose views will set agendas for the rest of us.’¹⁵ As an institution, the SNGMA never reached the position of authority where it could set the agenda. Initially, this was experienced as a shortcoming, but in today’s society, which has rejected a univocal interpretation of art, its more piecemeal collection is no longer such a defect, as the notion of ‘completeness’ in collections has also been discredited.¹⁶ Elliott, on his appointment as Director at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, wrote: ‘The task of the museum of modern art is to mediate between art and a wider public. It has to find the right spaces, the right lighting, the right languages, the right tones of voice and, on occasion, the right time to remain silent...’¹⁷ This has been the ambition of the SNGMA since its inception, but the quest for the right spaces and the right tone of voice continues.

The growing field of museum studies makes clear what complex institutions public museums are. Adopting the approach suggested by Marcia Pointon of linking the theories that underlie current museology with a chronological account of one specific institution, this study has demonstrated that the history of a specific museum depends on many factors, both external and internal. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill explains:

Museums have always had to modify how they worked, and what they did, according to the context, the plays of power, and the social, economic and political imperatives that surrounded them. Museums, in common with all other social institutions, serve many masters, and must play many tunes accordingly. Perhaps success can be defined by the ability to balance all the tunes that must be played and still make a sound worth listening to.¹⁸

The quotation offers a fitting conclusion to this analysis of the SNGMA’s achievements. The institution has indeed succeeded in playing the many different tunes that are expected of it by its many masters. It performs some more harmoniously than others, but overall it succeeds well, given the inauspicious start and the continued lack of adequate public funding, particularly for major building projects. As it passes its first half-century, it continues to explore ways of combining all its sometimes contradictory functions, and remains committed to providing the people of Scotland with the opportunity to experience a wide variety of art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

¹⁵ Mark Miller Graham, ‘The Future of Art History and the Undoing of the Survey’, in *Art Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 3, Autumn 1995, pp. 30-34.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁷ Elliott, p. 10.

¹⁸ Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 1.

APPENDIX A

Letters from Stanley Cursiter to William Ormsby-Gore re possible sites for a GMA, 1934

Rt. Hon. William Ormsby Gore, P.C.,
First Commissioner of Works,
H.M. Office of Works,
Storey's Gate,
Westminster,
London S.W.1.

1. 11th July, 4.

Dear Mr Ormsby Gore,

Very many thanks for your letter of 10th July. I can see the difficulties in the way of the site in Queen Street, but at the same time we must not overlook its very great advantages from an administrative point of view.

We already know the difficulty of running the Galleries here in buildings so far separated as the Portrait Gallery and the National Gallery. A third building at some little distance from the centre of the town would be a further complication.

If we could be assured that the Queen Street site would be available in, say, four years, this might not be too long in which to make the necessary arrangements and prepare for the advent of a new Gallery. The alterations at the Portrait Gallery have taken three years. It would indeed be very desirable that, after the plans for a new Gallery have been completed, a full size model of at least one room should be erected so that the final arrangements for lighting, both natural and artificial, should be fully explored before the actual building is put in hand. Two years were devoted to such experiments at Rotterdam, and it would certainly be necessary to carry on the experiments over twelve months at least. My one disappointment in connection with the Portrait Gallery is that our experiments were curtailed and that we did not fully realise what the effect would be with the sun at its summer altitude.

However /

However, I shall go over the map again and the ground and send you a plan of Edinburgh with open spaces marked which would seem to me suitable as possible sites. The difficulty there would seem that if the site is desirable its cost may be prohibitive, but at this stage it would perhaps also be wise to approach the Lord Provost confidentially and find out if there is any town planning scheme in mind which would provide a central site to which the Corporation might subscribe. You might perhaps let me know whether it would be better for me to do this personally or whether it would be more appropriately done through the Office of Works.

Sites are always a difficulty in Edinburgh and while I do appreciate very much indeed the necessity for proceeding quickly, it would be a fatal mistake to accept a site merely because it was available and leave the Gallery under a permanent disadvantage.

I shall write again in a few days as soon as I have had time to make the necessary inquiries.

Yours sincerely,

Director.

1. 17th July, 4.

Rt. Hon. William Ormsby Gore, P.C.,
First Commissioner of Works,
H.M. Office of Works,
Storey's Gate,
Westminster,
London S.W.1.

Dear Mr Ormsby Gore,

I have spent the week-end exploring Edinburgh. On the map which I enclose the area marked in yellow is the only part of the town which is considered central. In that area there are a few sites which one might think of, such as the Music Hall in George Street, and of sites adjacent to the area, the Synod Hall in Castle Terrace, a block of offices recently vacated by the Corporation in Waterloo Place, and the Royal High School, but, with the exception of the Royal High School, none of these sites are really suitable and the cost in every case would be prohibitive. The High School would be excellent, but I doubt whether we could persuade the school to move. You will notice that in this area the Queen Street site has every claim for our attention. No other central site can be compared with it.

Sites outside the Central Area coloured green.

North west.

1. St. Bernard's Ward. Inverleith Place bordering on the Royal Botanic Gardens. An open space at present used, I understand, as a nursery in connection with the Forestry Commission and in temporary Government occupation. This area has evidently been reserved as a building site. There are six or seven houses to the east end and one on the corner site of Inverleith Place and Arboretum Road but ample space remains for a gallery. It has many advantages over the other sites in St. Bernard's Ward. It could have an entrance from Inverleith Place and another to the Botanic Gardens /

Gardens of which it is virtually a part. Looked at as a possible combination of Art Gallery and Botanic Gardens, the site is attractive. The adjacent tram line links it directly with the National Gallery and Portrait Gallery.

2. East Fettes Avenue. Facing Inverleith Public Park. A large open space but set at the wrong angle. The natural frontage is to the south, parallel to that of Fettes College. Accessible by tram which passes the National Gallery in Princes Street. On the return journey this tram "loops" along George Street, via St. Andrew Square, convenient for the Portrait Gallery. I mention these tramway links as I think they are important.

3. Sites to the north of Queensferry Road. Good open spaces. A long valley runs north east. The ground falls to the north. Accessible by bus starting at National Gallery. A large residential district. Blackhall, Davidson's Mains, Cramond and Queensferry lie to the west and there is a good bus service but it is a road of quick moving traffic at this spot.

Site to the west.

4. Haymarket Ward. Roseburn Public Park. This site lies close to one of the main arteries, the Edinburgh-Glasgow road, and on the route to the Zoo. It is slightly masked by houses but the approach from the town is open.

Sites to the south.

5. Merchiston Ward. Merchiston Castle. The old Castle, school buildings, and grounds, also two or three houses to the east. In the market at the moment. This site has great possibilities. There is ample space and the surrounding housing area is better than that at Bruntsfield House. The Castle is important as the home of Napier. I have not seen the interior and I do not know if it has possibilities for period settings. I can visualise a very pleasant gallery rather like the Frans Hals at Haarlem with a formal garden enclosed occupying the ground to the west of the Castle, with the ground to the east in reserve. Tram service from Princes Street passes the National Gallery.

6. /

6. Morningside Ward. Bruntsfield House. I have marked the area for comparison.

7. Newington. West Mains Road. Open space opposite new Departments of Edinburgh University. Stands high. Ground falls to the north. Fine prospect of Edinburgh and Arthur's Seat. Rather too far out and so far the Departments of the University which might link with Art are still in the Old Quadrangle.

Site to the South east.

8. I have marked a site to the south of Duddingston Loch. It is an amazing situation. The ground falls to the Loch, the Rev. John Thomson's manse and kirk on the other side and Arthur's Seat beyond. A beautiful setting. The industrial area at Craigmillar is hidden by rising ground. Approach only by bus. At present this is far afield, but you will see that the town is developing rapidly at Niddrie, Portobello and Meadowbank, so that the link south of Arthur's Seat will very shortly be closed. It is one of the most beautiful settings in Edinburgh. It should be secured for some public purpose, otherwise somebody will build a bungalow.

Of the various sites I have noted, and if immediate availability is to dominate the choice, I would suggest that the sites at Inverleith Place, Merchiston Castle, and Bruntsfield House should be investigated further with regard to probable costs and also the type of building which would be suitable for each locality. The Merchiston site might require special treatment, whereas the other two are similar in character and a building of modern simplicity would do for both. Inverleith perhaps rather more expensive in demanding two fronts. Merchiston would always hold an air of romance, while the site I have noted at Duddingston is one that could not exist outside of Scotland. It is unique and suggests the Lady of the Lake, Sir Walter Scott, the stag at eve, and all the other elements which make the Scotland of the summer tourist. At the moment it is the least easily approached.

Still /

Still I must again end my letter with the special plea that Edinburgh thinks only in terms of the yellow space on my map. Anything beyond that area is considered remote. It is difficult enough to get people to go as far as the Portrait Gallery but with another Gallery on the other side of the street it might be possible to create a new centre which would be to the benefit of both Galleries.

From this morning's "Scotsman" I see that the Calton plans have been approved by the Fine Art Commission. This may make it possible to decide fairly soon whether the Calton scheme is to go ahead. If not, the Calton site must also be considered.

The decision of the Fine Art Commission will clarify the position and if we know definitely that the Queen Street site is to be vacated, it would seem a pity to lose an opportunity which fate seems to have placed in our hands for concentrating rather than decentralising our Art Galleries.

Would you not authorise that rough plans should be drawn to show how this site might be utilised, even restricted to the area covered by the Board of Agriculture but with the possibility of extending downhill in Duke Street, so that the question of acquiring other property there might be regarded as part of the costs involved.

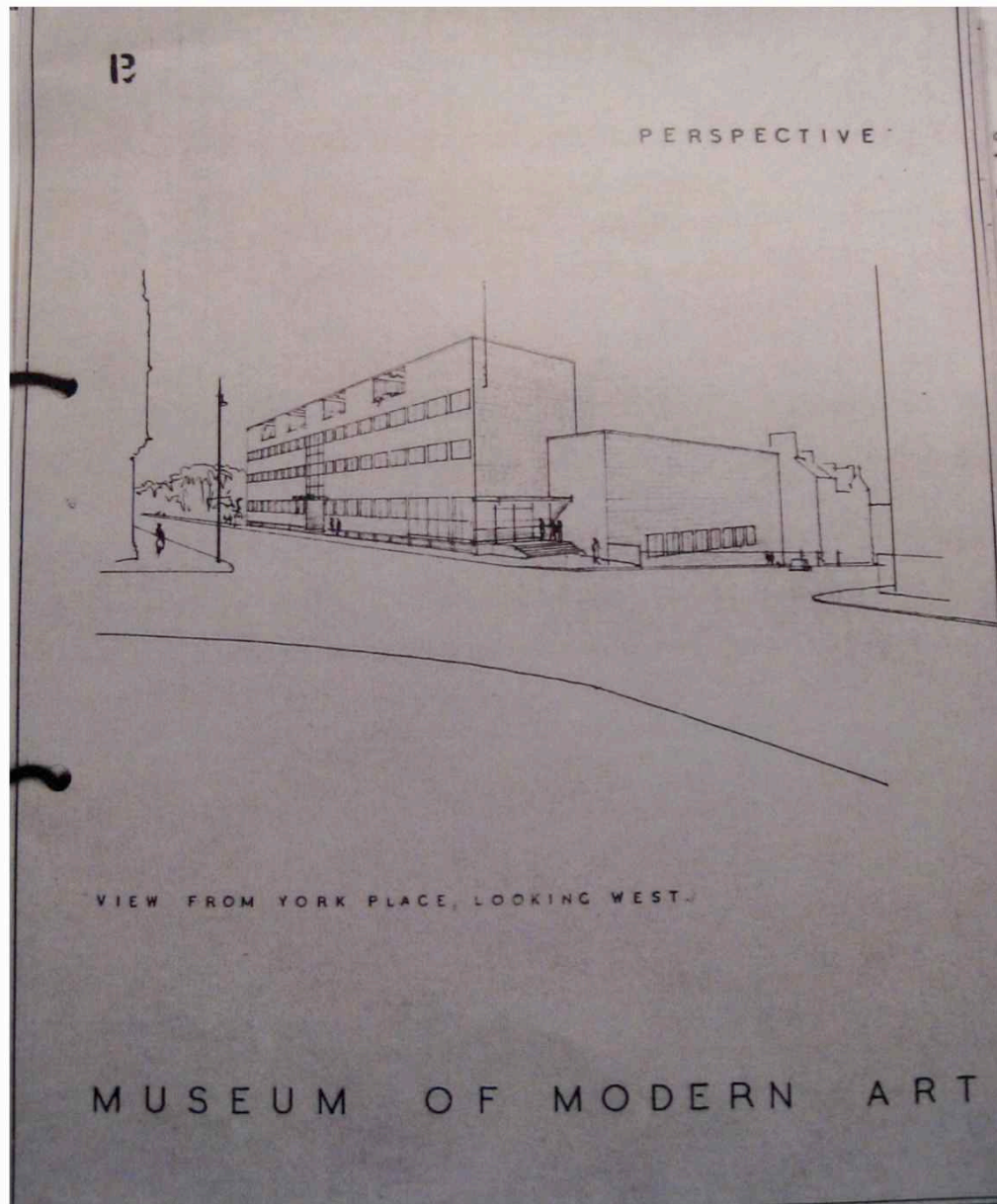
Please let me know if there is anything more which I can do to help matters forward.

Yours sincerely,

Director.

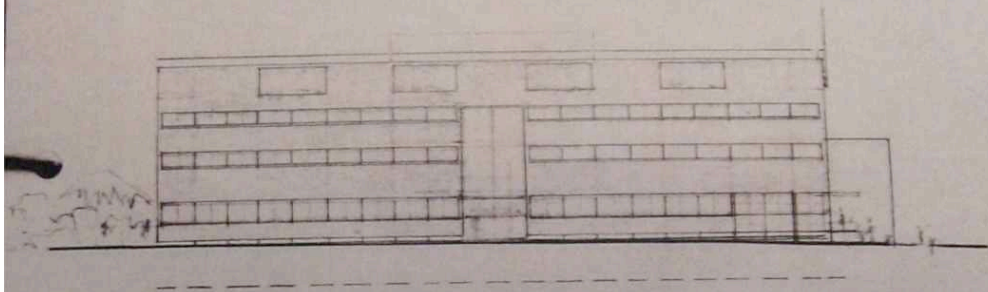
APPENDIX B

Alan Reiach plans for York Buildings site

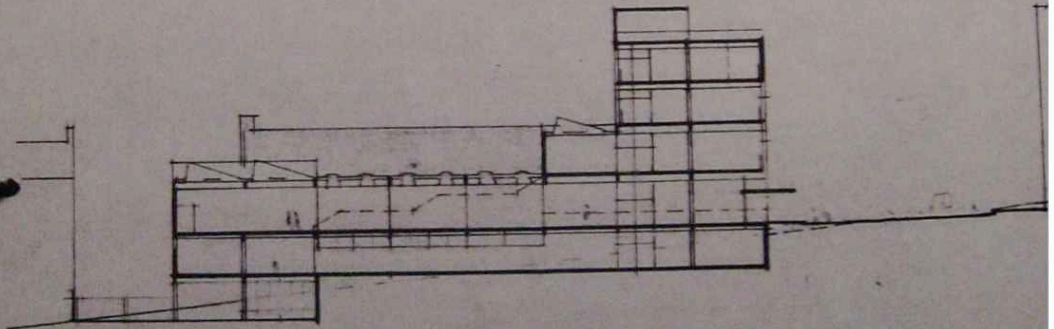


12

ELEVATION



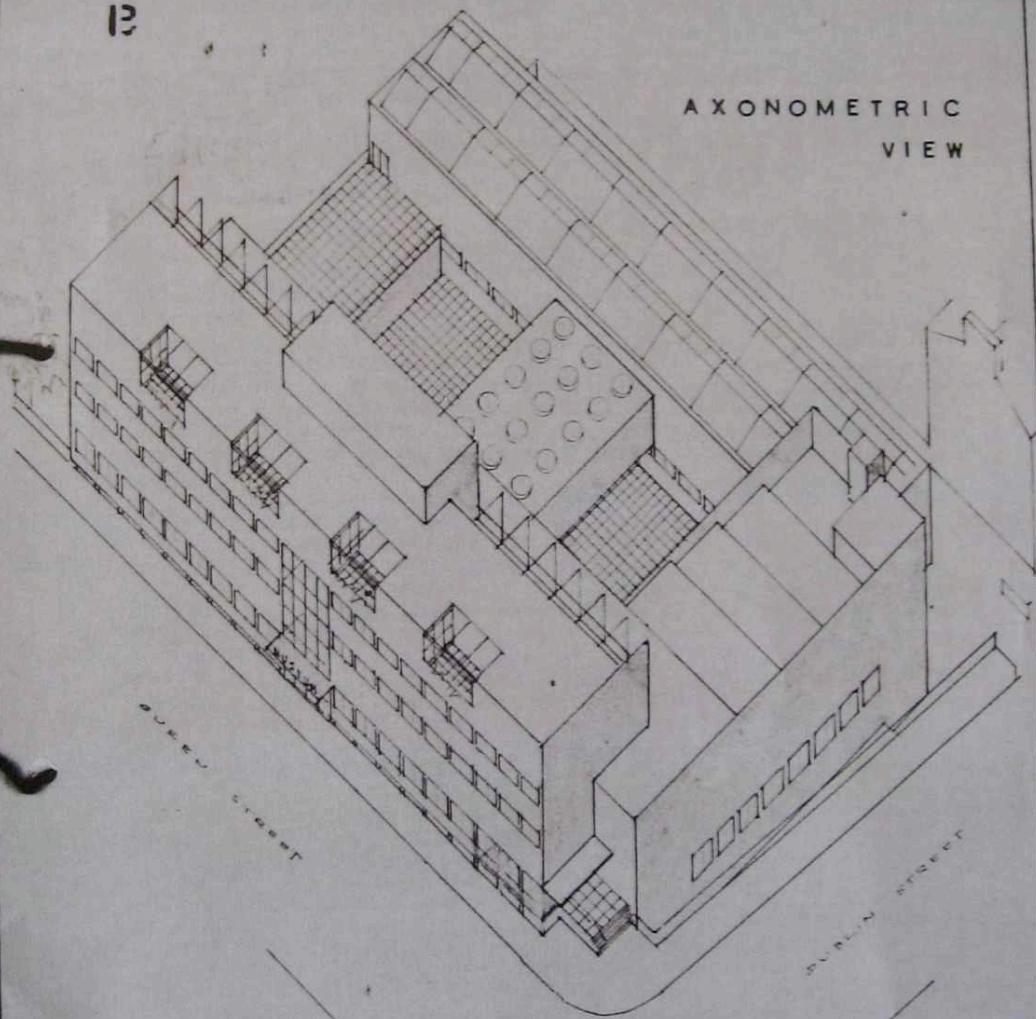
SECTION 'A-A'



MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

12

AXONOMETRIC
VIEW

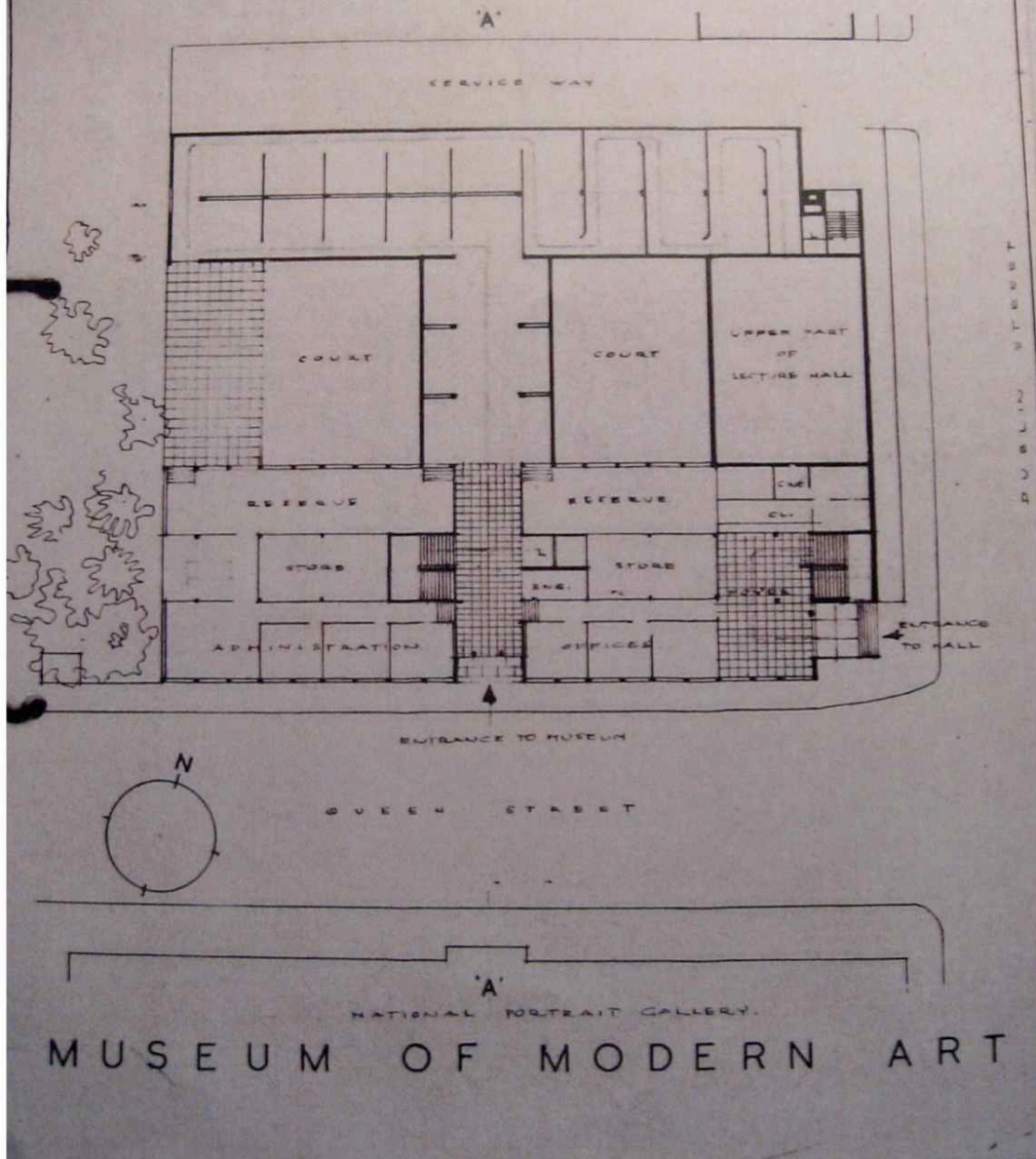


VIEW SHOWING METHOD OF LIGHTING

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

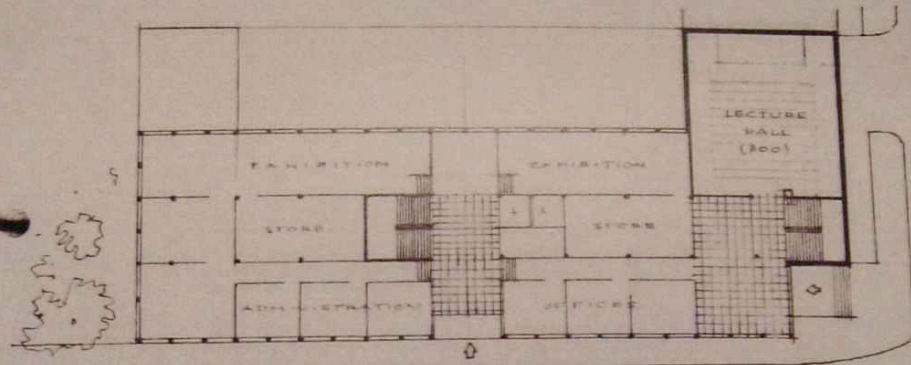
13

GROUND FLOOR

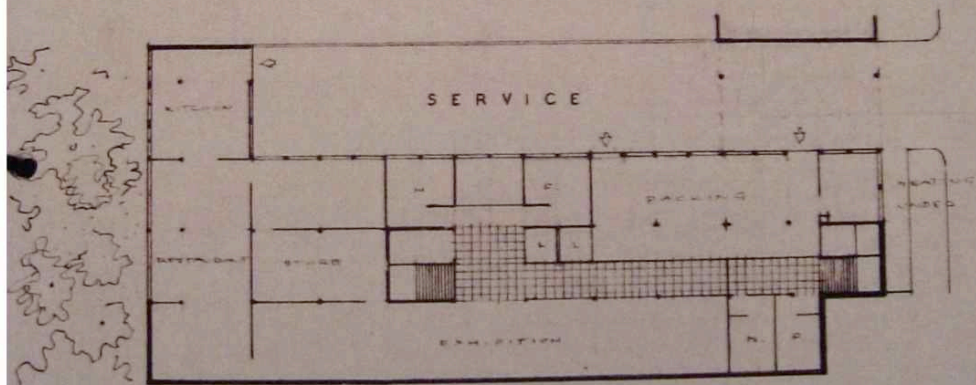


A

GROUND FLOOR



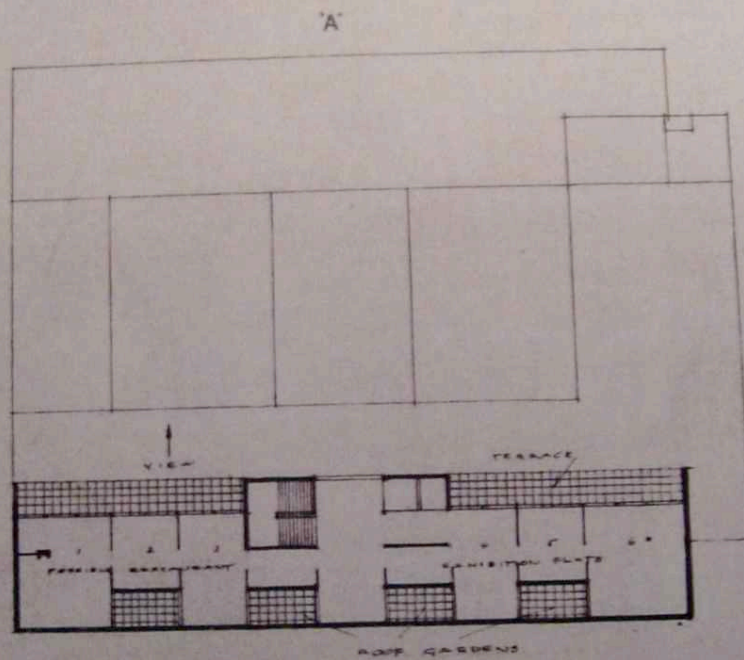
LOWER GROUND FLOOR



MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

12

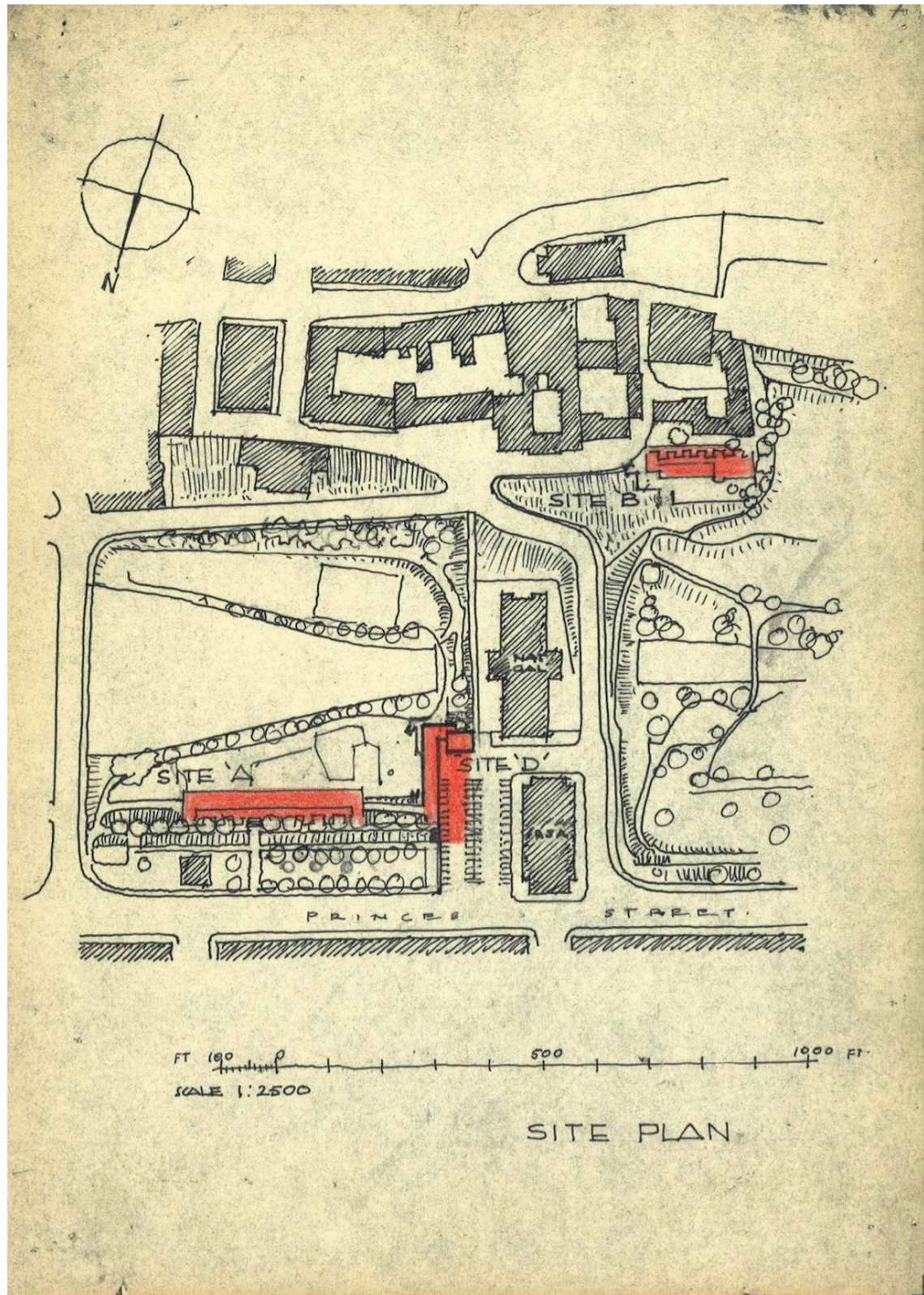
THIRD FLOOR



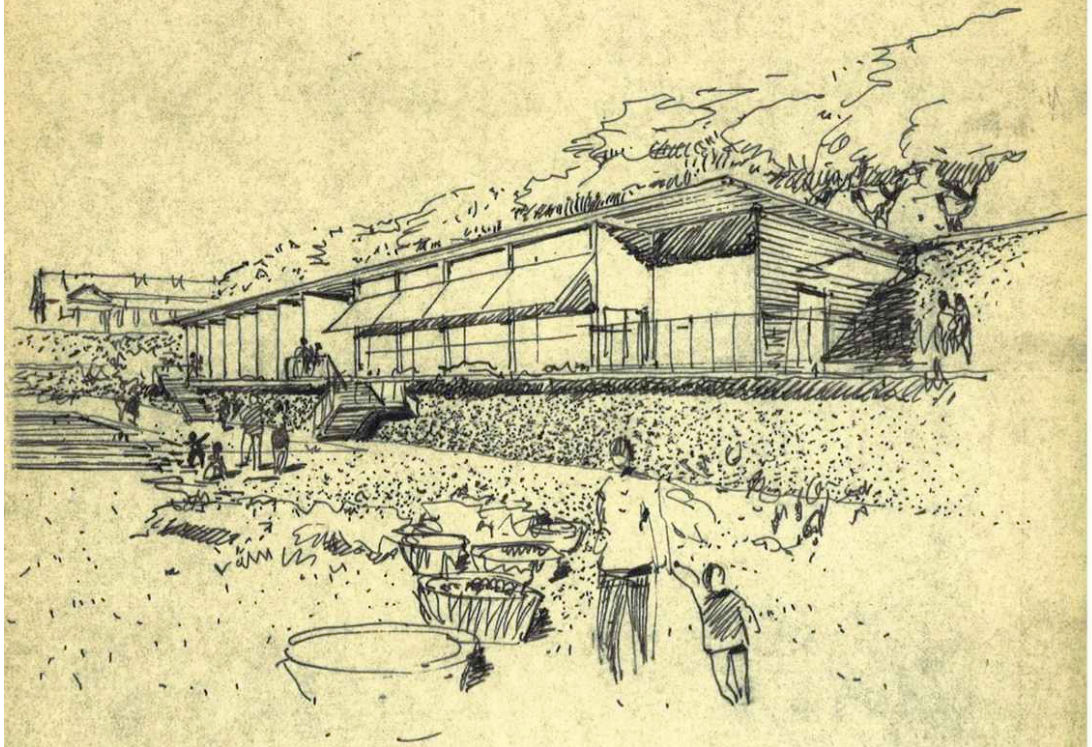
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

APPENDIX C

Alan Reiach proposals for the Festival of Britain



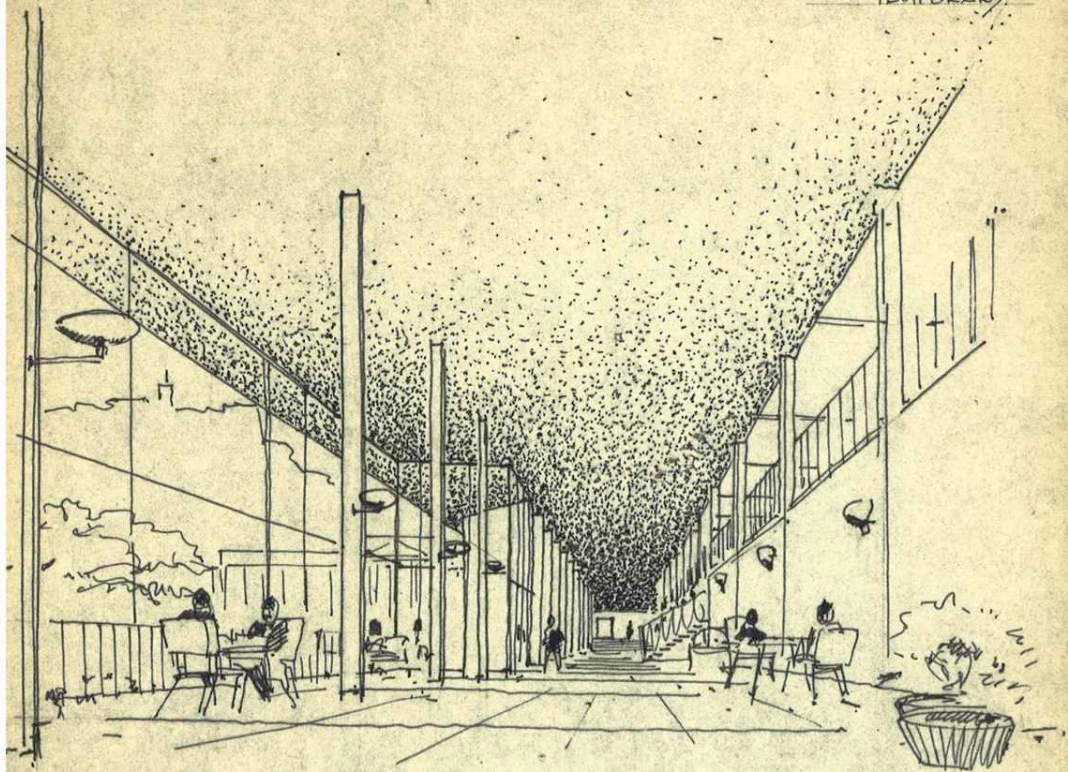
SITE 'A'
TEMPORARY.



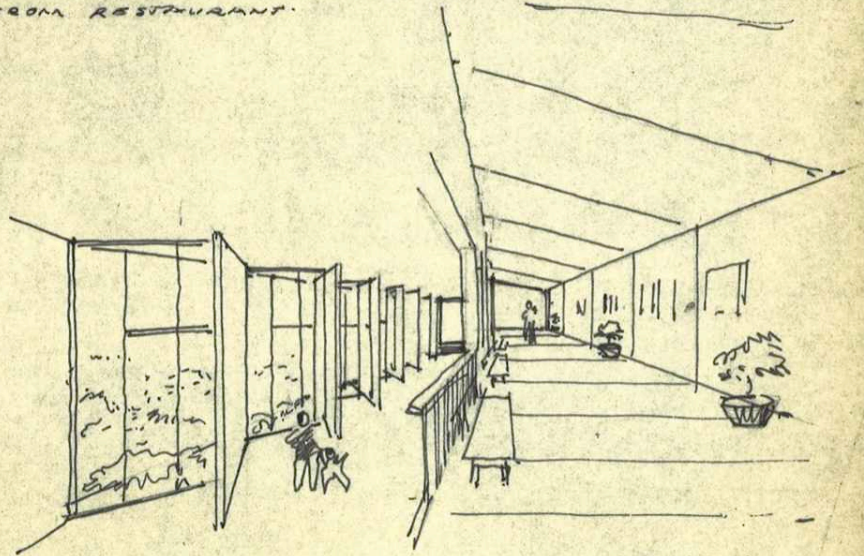
VIEW FROM S.E. AT LOWER
GARDEN LEVEL

SITE A

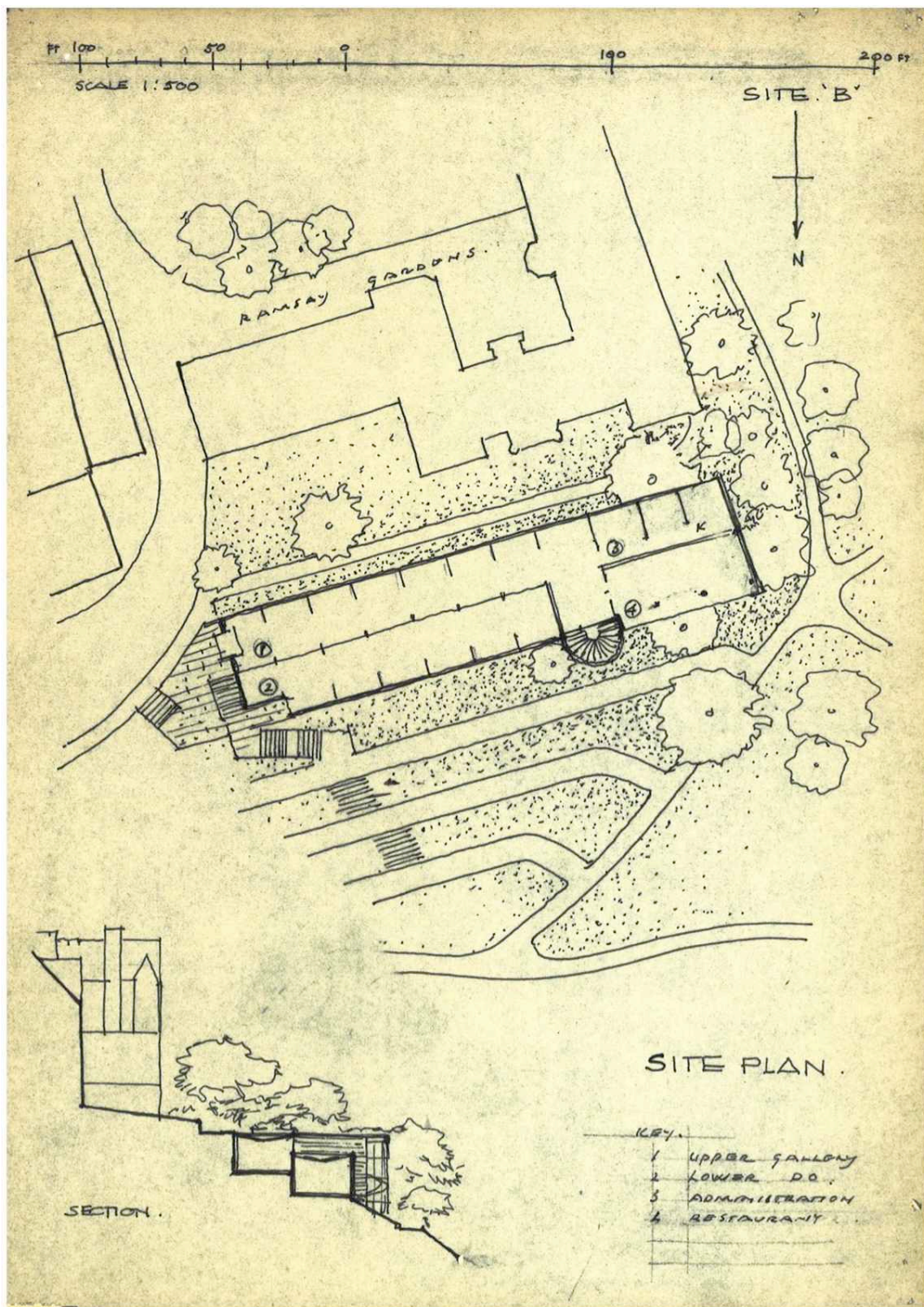
TEMPORARY



VIEW FROM RESTAURANT.

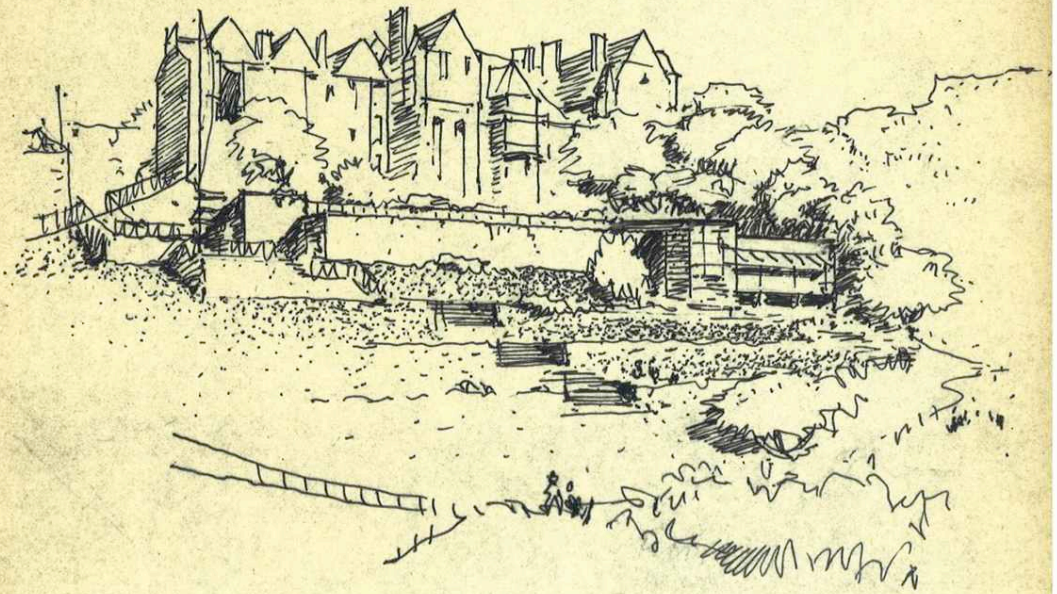


VIEW FROM GALLERY.

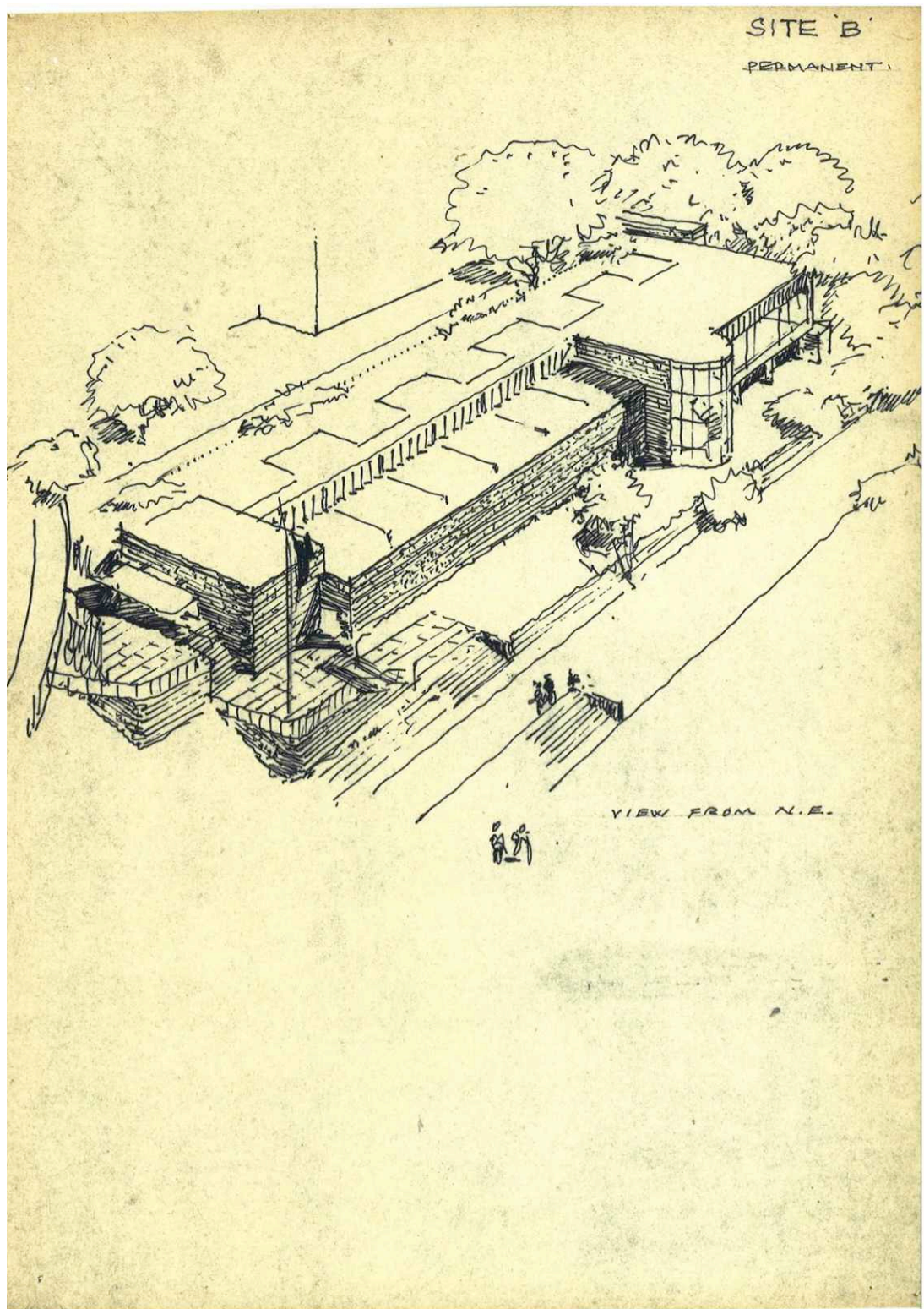


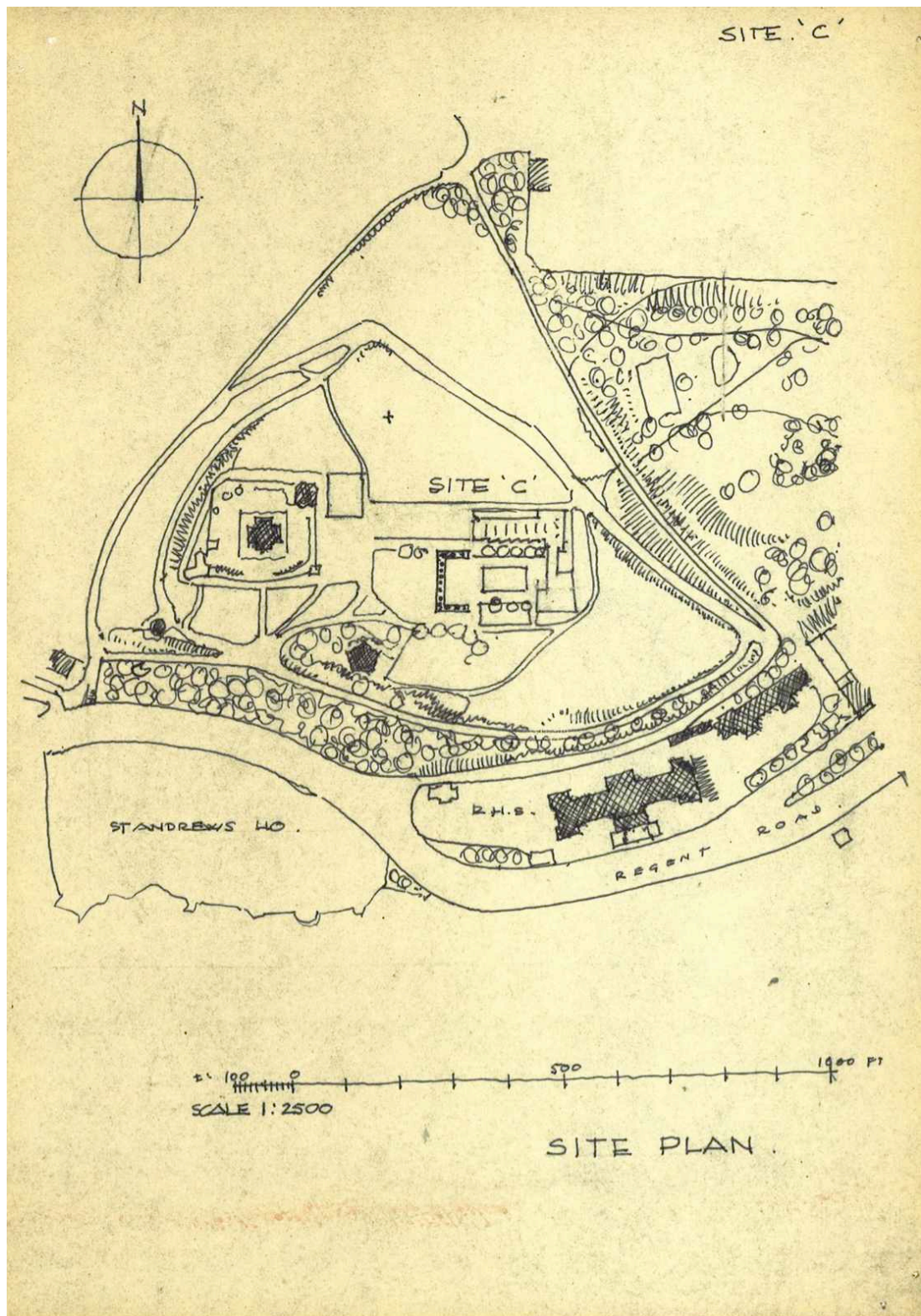
SITE 'B'

PERMANENT

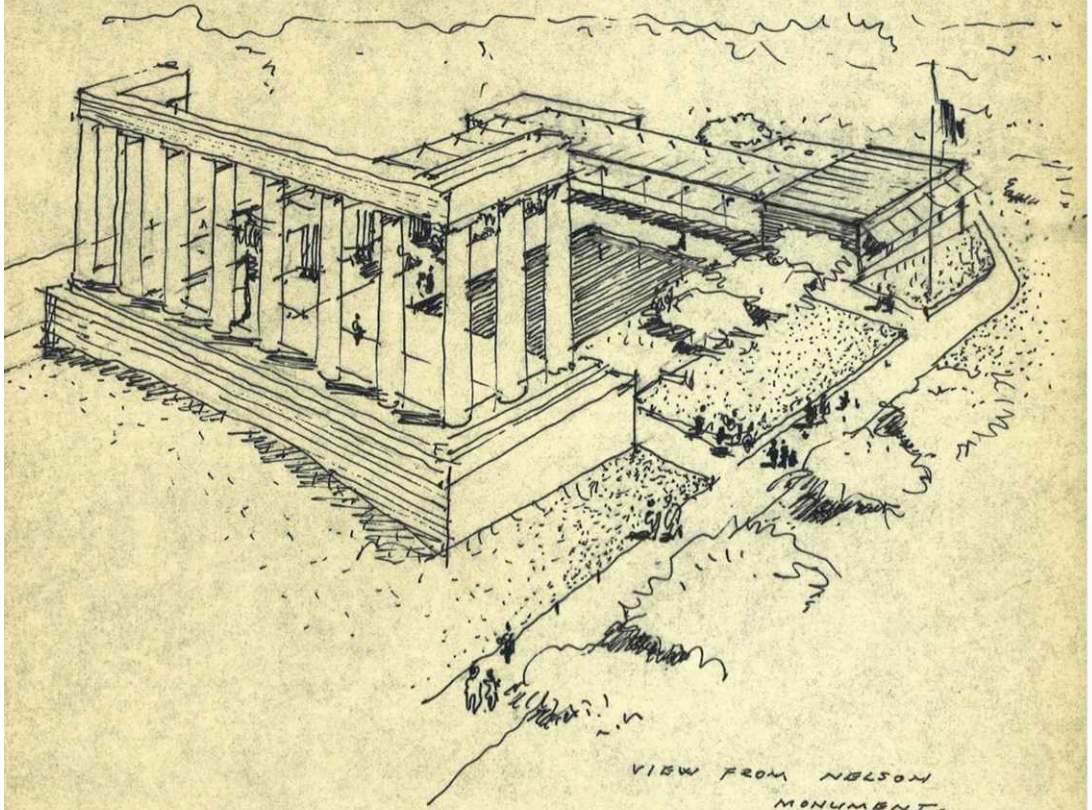


VIEW FROM THE MOUND.



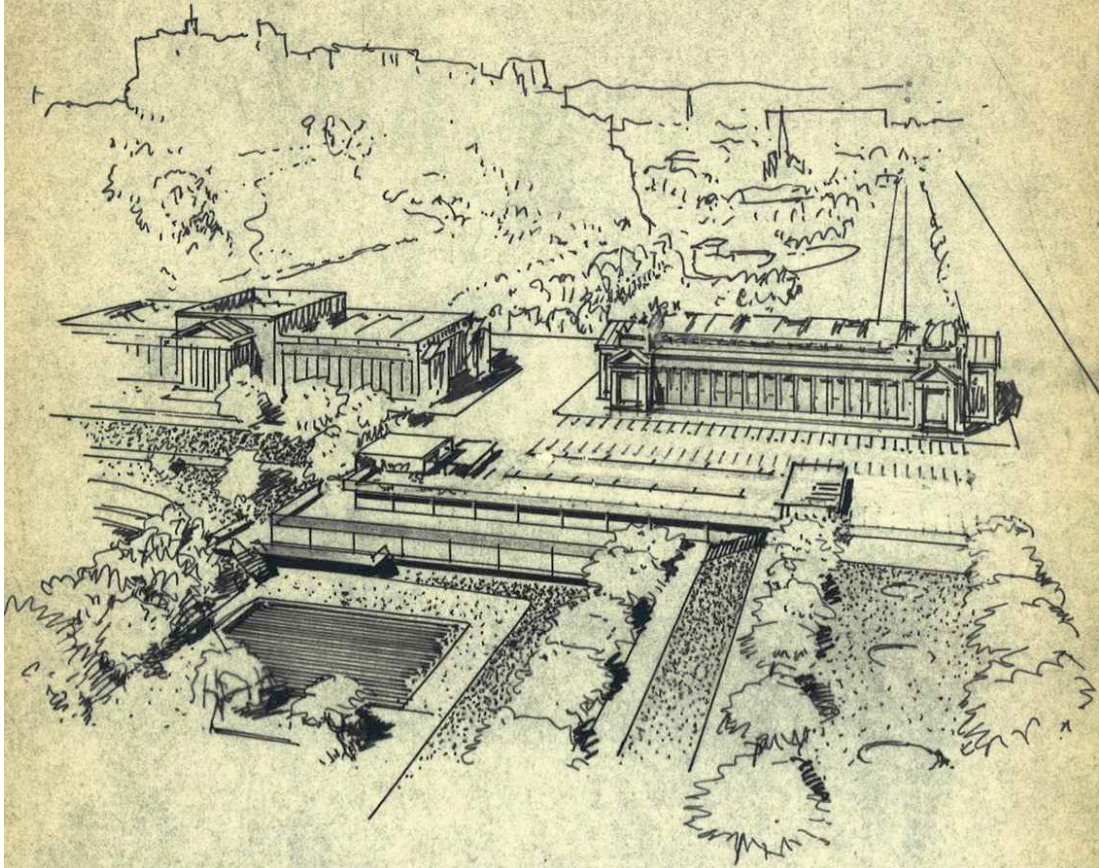


SITE 'C'
TEMPORARY



VIEW FROM NELSON
MONUMENT.

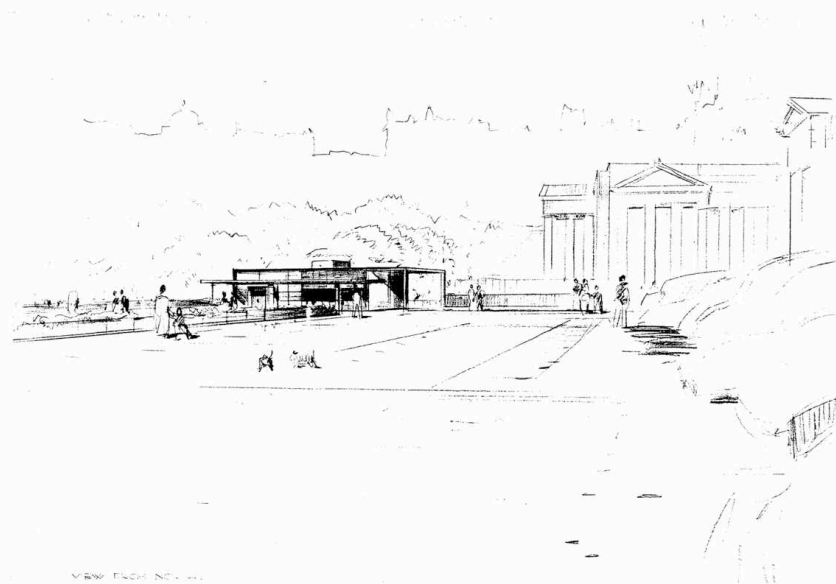
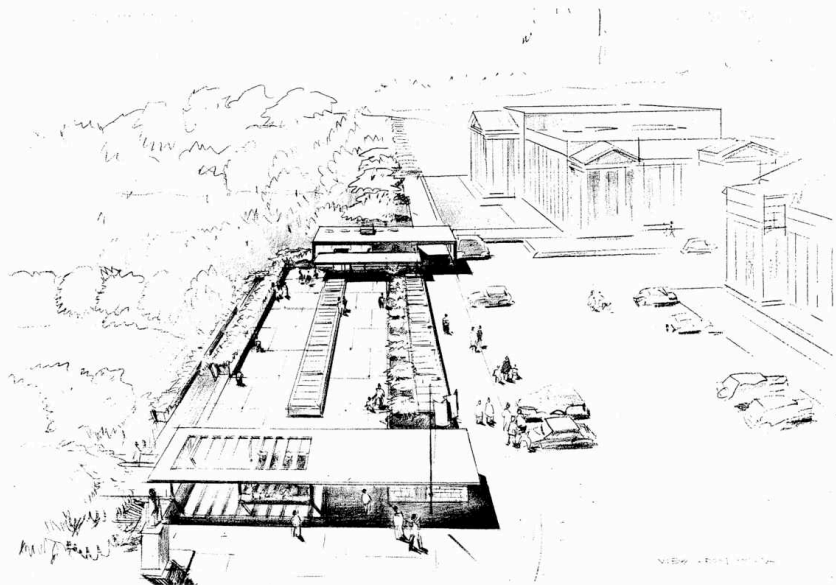
SITE 'D'
PERMANENT



VIEW FROM
SCOTT MONUMENT.

Alan Reiach plans for a GMA in Princes Street Gardens East





APPENDIX E

Suggestions for purchases for the Gallery of Modern Art - 1960

SUGGESTIONS FOR PURCHASING FOR THE GALLERY OF MODERN ART

1. GENERAL

A long-term view would probably be the ideal one for this problem, in which our policy would be judged by what had been acquired after, say, twenty years. Unfortunately this is affected by the necessity of having something to show when the Gallery opens next July or August. By that time we shall have had £15,000 available for purchases of modern art. In the long-term view there might be a strong case for saving this and putting it towards the possible purchase of a masterpiece by Picasso, Braque or Matisse. The more practical alternative would be to use all or the greater part of it in such a way as to obtain the best possible display when the gallery opens. On the assumption that this second course will be pursued, it is probably helpful to consider the needs of the collection in three sections:

Scottish, English, Foreign.

It need hardly be stressed that when it is recommended that works by certain artists might be purchased, this would depend on first-rate works by these artists being available, and that a good Appel or Pollock cannot be as easily purchased as if it were a matter of fruit or fish.

2. SCOTTISH

It is not necessary to buy any Scottish works before the gallery opens, as the work of deceased 20th century Scottish painters is well covered by the works that will be transferred from the Mound, and that of living Scottish painters by the collection which the Scottish Committee of the Arts Council has agreed to lend for three or four months. Other suitable works may be available from the Scottish Modern Arts Association, either as long-term loans or as gifts.

When, after three or four months, the Arts Council pictures are withdrawn, we shall probably find it necessary to acquire works by the leading living Scottish painters, though this may depend on what help we receive from the Scottish Modern Arts Association. It should also be remembered that we are likely to receive more offers of gifts of works by modern Scottish painters than of works of any other kind.

There is one special case. If we could find a good pre-1914 painting by J.D. Fergusson, it would be a useful purchase. Although his best work belongs to this comparatively remote period, we have so far been unable to buy it because he is still alive.

Apart from this, it would seem wise not to embark on buying modern Scottish paintings before the Gallery opens. It is, however, suggested that we should buy a few of the better original colour lithographs made by Scottish artists and published by Harley Brothers, of Edinburgh, as these can be usefully shown in the rooms reserved for prints and drawings on the second floor.

3. ENGLISH

The prices of works by the more important 20th century British artists, though not low, are at least very much lower than those of the leading French artists of the same period. The Board might therefore feel that, to begin with, purchases for this section should be sought in preference to those for the foreign section. Although (as explained below) it is suggested that we should attempt to secure a few modern foreign works this year, it is probable that we should be wise to use more than half our resources for English works.

We cannot, and should not, hope to "illustrate" everything that went on in English painting in the past 60 years. What is important is to have good works by some of the best artists. A few of these must be represented:

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Sickert, Epstein, Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson, and probably Matthew Smith. (Sickert and Epstein are each already represented by one excellent work.) For the rest, it would be desirable to get, as we can, good examples by Christopher Wood, David Jones (a water-colour and engravings), Paul Nash, Wyndham Lewis (a drawing would suffice), Graham Sutherland (fairly early work), Pasmore, Ceri Richards, and possibly Lanyon, Frost and William Scott. Among sculptors other than Epstein and Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Reg Butler and possibly Lynn Chadwick should probably be the first choices.

These are not exclusive lists. Individual works of unusual merit by many other artists might well be acquired. The early Orpen painting "A Bloomsbury Family", belonging to the Scottish Modern Arts Association would, for example, be a most welcome gift, if the Association should feel able to make it. One or two good pictures by members of the Camden Town group would be equally useful.

Because since the war the reputation of British art abroad has probably stood higher than at any time since the death of Constable, and because the chief causes of this are the sculpture of Moore and the painting of Nicholson, the representation of both these artists by important works seems the most urgent need when the Gallery opens. Neither is cheap. Casts of Moore's "King and Queen" sold at £3,000, and of the large "Study for the Unesco Reclining Figure" at £10,000. Each copy of this second figure cost £3,000 to cast; the sculptor would certainly have sold a cast to a Gallery at less than the dealer's price. The last Gallery-size Nicholson painting I priced was £2,000, but his prices have risen since then.

4. FOREIGN

(a) Painting in France

Post-Cézannian painting in France from about 1905 to 1930 was a vital and important movement. Ultimately we should have examples of at least the following phases:

The Fauves (Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck or Braque of 1905-6).

The 1907-9 Cézannesque phase of Picasso, Derain or Vlaminck.

Early cubist Braque or Picasso.

Later cubist work, Braque and Picasso, possibly Gris.

Examples of other phases of Matisse, Picasso, Braque.

Examples of Mondrian, Miro, possibly Leger.

Isolated masters: Rouault, Soutine, Chagall, and the Douanier Rousseau.

Surrealism (one fairly romantic early or middle period Ernst might suffice).

The prices of these are too high to make it possible to acquire them except very gradually over a longish period, but it is recommended that some such representation as the above should be our ultimate aim. The acquisition of a good work in any of the categories listed above would, in short, be another brick in the edifice it is recommended we aim to construct.

Etchings, engravings and lithographs by many of the painters of this period exist. Some of these might usefully be acquired, provided that they are original prints; that is, that the artist himself has worked on the plate or stone. Caution is necessary, as French publishers have produced very many prints in which the reproduction of the artist's drawing has been carried out by another hand; these are little more than limited edition reproductions signed by the artist. The better original prints by, say Matisse or Picasso, cost anything from about seventy to several hundred pounds.

The prices of painters who have come to the fore in France since the war are not so high. Of these the following seem to me the most worth acquiring:

De Stael, Manessier, Bazaine, Poliakov, Riopelle, Soulages, Bissière, Vieira da Silva, Singier.

It is not necessary to represent all these painters, but works by two or three of them would be desirable.

The prices of De Stael's work have soared since his death, but typical works by most of the others can be bought for prices between about £750 and £2,500.

Modern sculpture in France should at least be represented by Maillol (of which we have one) and Brancusi, with possibly Lipchitz and Gabo. We already own a major work by Bourdelle.

(b) Painting in Germany

The main interest centres on the expressionist painters who established themselves about 1907-14. The earlier work of Kandinsky should be represented, and paintings by one or two of the following:

Schmidt-Rottluff, Campendonk, Heckel, Kirchner, Nolde, Marc, Mueller, Modersohn-Becker, Pechstein, Feiniger and Kokoschka.

Prices of early Kandinsky paintings may exceed £20,000. Pictures by other artists named have sold recently at prices between about £1,000 and £8,000.

All these painters made numerous woodcuts and other prints. Although they hardly ever appear in this country, good examples can be bought in Germany for prices between about £20 and £150 each (though rare prints, such as some of Nolde's colour lithographs, may cost up to £600). Most German expressionists were not particularly sensitive manipulators of oil paint and their prints give far more of the content of their art than those of most painters do. A careful selection of these prints would be a very useful purchase.

The only other painter who worked in Germany whom it is particularly desirable to represent is Paul Klee, of whom we possess one water-colour.

(c) Italy

In the earlier part of our period there is little that it is essential to represent. Of more recent painters Morandi and Guttuso might well be sought. Their prices are not high by comparison with those in France or Germany. I bought an excellent medium sized Guttuso for Sydney (from the artist, not through a dealer) three years ago for just under £350, and Morandi also, if approached directly, sells at extremely modest prices. Guttuso's drawings and Morandi's etchings are also worth acquiring.

The striking revival of sculpture in Italy should be represented by examples of Marini and Manzù.

(d) Other Countries

In the Netherlands, Appel is a painter who has made an outstanding contribution to post-war abstract painting. A good example can still be bought for about £500-£700.

In America, only the artists who have contributed to the main stream of modern painting need be considered. Here Jackson Pollock is almost certainly both the best and the most influential painter. One of his works would be a desirable acquisition.

5. SUMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS FOR PURCHASES TO BE SOUGHT THIS YEAR

English Painting

First Priority: Nicholson ✓
Second Priority: Matthew Smith, Sutherland, Ceri Richards, Pasmore
Possibly: Frost, William Scott, Lanyon

English Sculpture

First Priority: Moore ✓
Second Priority: Hepworth, Butler, Chadwick

English Drawings and Water-colours

David Jones, Wyndham Lewis, Paul Nash

Foreign Paintings

One or two works by the post-war French painters listed on page 2
One painting by Morandi and one by Guttuso
One painting by Appel ✓

Foreign Prints

A small group of German Expressionist prints
A few of the more important prints by French masters of the earlier part of the century. 4

Sutherland
Richards
Pasmore
Lanyon
David Jones
Wyndham Lewis
Morandi
Guttuso

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C. Newspapers and Journals

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